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THE

# WORKS

Of the Most Reverend

## Dr. JOHN SHARP,

LATE

Lord Archbishop of YORK.

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VOL. II. CONTAINING,

## SERMONS,

PREACHED ON

## SEVERAL OCCASIONS:

WITH TWO

## DISCOURSES on CONSCIENCE.

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The FIFTH EDITION.

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# SERMON I.

## Repentance the means for the averting God's judgment.

REV. ii. 5.

——*I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candleſtick out of his place, except thou repent.*

WE are this day met together to humble ourſelves for our ſins before God, and to implore his mercy to this nation, in the preſerving our king, our laws, our religion, and our lives; and in bleſſing the preſent publick counſels, in order thereunto.

And never was a work of this nature more ſeaſonable or more neceſſary than at this time, and to us of this kingdom: for as our ſins were never greater, never cried louder to heaven for vengeance, ſo the judgments they deſerve did never more viſibly threaten us than they do at this day: inſomuch, that, if our circumſtances be duly conſidered, we may have juſt reaſon to apprehend, that our Saviour in the way of his providence does now ſpeak

to his people and church of England, the ſame words that he ordered St. John, by the way of letter, to ſpeak to the church of Epheſus: *Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the firſt works, or elſe I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candleſtick out of his place, except thou repent.*

This church of Epheſus, as alſo the other ſix churches of Aſia, to each of which St. John, by the command of our Saviour, doth here addreſs a ſeveral epiſtle, were, at the time when theſe letters were dictated, very flouriſhing churches, favoured as much with the eſpecial preſence and influence of Chriſt, as ever any churches were.

This appears from the preface to this epiſtle in the firſt verſe of this chapter, wherein Chriſt, the author of the epiſtle, is deſcribed as *holding the ſeven ſtars in his right hand, and walking in the midſt of the ſeven golden candleſticks.*

The [a] ſeven ſtars are the angels of the ſeven churches, as he himſelf interprets them; that is, according to the ſenſe of all antiquity, the biſhops, the preſidents, the governors of thoſe churches. His holding them in his hand, is his ſupporting and directing them for the good of the people. The ſeven golden candleſticks [b] in the midſt of which he walked, are, as he himſelf likewiſe expounds them, the ſeven churches themſelves, as being the places where thoſe ſtars, thoſe lights did ſhine. And his walking among thoſe candleſticks is his preſence in thoſe churches, encouraging or reproving, rewarding or puniſhing the members of them, as there was cauſe,

[a] Rev. i. 20. [b] Ibid.

cauſe, having the power in his hands, either to continue thoſe lights among them, or to remove them to another place.

I inſiſt on the explication of this paſſage, becauſe it lets us into the meaning of the phraſe that we meet with in the text, of removing the candleſtick out of its place, which from hence we plainly ſee to be the unchurching any people, the withdrawing the light of the goſpel from them.

Well, but this church of Epheſus, to which the Epiſtle I am now concerned in was written, how much ſoever Chriſt had done for them, had, it ſeems, made but a bad requital of his kindneſſes [c]. At firſt indeed they had walked very worthily, and are much commended by our Saviour, for their zeal, and piety, and labour in religion; but now they were fallen to a great degree of negligence and remiſſneſs.

It is true, they at this time continued orthodox in their doctrines and opinions, they did both know and profeſs the true religion, and were zealous againſt falſe doctrines; which alſo our Saviour takes notice of, and commends them for, [d] *This*, ſaith he, *thou haſt, that thou hateſt the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I alſo hate*; but yet, notwithſtanding, ſo offended was he with the loſs of their firſt love, the decay of devotion and charity among them, that he threatens them ſolemnly in the text, *That if they did not repent, and do the firſt works, he would remove their candleſtick out of its place*; that is, as I ſaid, he would withdraw from them his preſence and the light of the goſpel.



[c] Rev. ii. 2, 3. [d] Ver. 6.

This is a brief account of my text, as to the firſt deſign and literal meaning of it, that is, as it concerns the church of Epheſus. I now deſire leave to make ſuch application of it to ourſelves, as may be ſubſervient to the ends deſigned in the ſolemnity of this day.

And we have warrant enough to make ſuch an application; for, let us not flatter ourſelves, what is here reproved, and what is here threatened, hath not ſuch a peculiar reſpect to the particular church of Epheſus, but that it doth eqally concern all churches, ſo far as they fall under the ſame character. Which whether we at this day do or no, it is fit we ſhould ſeriouſly examine ourſelves about.

Here are three things conſiderable in the text. Firſt, A great ſin, and guilt ſuppoſed. Secondly, A great judgment denounced for that guilt, no leſs than the unchurching of that people that had contracted it. Thirdly, the means preſcribed for the averting that judgment, viz. repentance.

My application of the text ſhall proceed upon the ſame heads, that is,

I. I ſhall firſt deſire leave to enquire, whether we of this nation, at this day, for our manifold ſins and guilt, may not be judged to be in as bad or worſe circumſtances than the church of Epheſus in the text, and conſequently have not juſt reaſon to fear the ſame judgment that they are here threatened with.

II. Secondly, I ſhall conſider the judgment here threatened, how grievous a one it is, and conſequently how great an argument the conſideration of it ought to be to us all to repent.

III.

III. Thirdly, I ſhall ſpeak ſomething of this repentance, how it ought to be expreſſed, if we would thereby prevent the judgment.

I. I begin with the firſt of theſe points which concern our ſin and our guilt, to make ſome repreſentation of the ſpiritual maladies and diſeaſes that this nation groans under, thoſe publick grievances, by which the Holy Spirit of God is provoked to withdraw himſelf from us, and to give us up to the power and dominion of other maſters.

This, I muſt confeſs, is a very melancholy and unpleaſing argument, but yet very neceſſary to be inſiſted on, and that very freely too: eſpecially upon ſuch an occaſion as this; and moſt of all, when I ſpeak to thoſe, whoſe concernment, and whoſe care it is to inſpect theſe matters, and from whom we hope for a cure of our diſtempers.

It is here taken notice of the church of Epheſus, to her commendation, that ſhe retained the truth of the chriſtian doctrine in oppoſition to the hereſies of thoſe times; and this, God be thanked, may be ſpoke of us at this day. We are not much degenerated from the purity of chriſtianity as to doctrinals. Our church may vie with all the churches in the world, for orthodoxy and conformity to the primitive church in matters of faith.

And, bleſſed be God's name, this light is not put under a buſhel. There is perhaps no church ſince the apoſtles time, wherein the divine truth hath been more publickly and more purely taught, or the ſacraments more rightly and duly adminiſtred than among us, and no church wherein

knowledge has more abounded among all the members of it, than it does now in ours.

But the thing that is charged upon the church of Epheſus, is their corruption in manners; and this is the point we are now concerned in, and which it is fit the whole nation ſhould examine themſelves upon, and deeply lay to heart.

Tho' we ſtill keep up the form of godlineſs, yet have we not in a great meaſure loſt the power thereof? Though the principles which our church owneth and profeſſeth be excellently good, yet do not many of us horribly contradict them in our practices? Is there not a viſible decay of chriſtian piety to be obſerved among us, and a deluge of vice and wickedneſs of all ſorts overſpreading the face of the land?

I ſpeak not here of the faults of this or the other particular perſon, for we know there was never any age, nor any religion that was free from ſuch; but I ſpeak of the national ſins, the reigning vices of the times, the miſcarriages that are ſo prevailing and ſo common, that a publick guilt is contracted by them, and the whole people may juſtly ſhare in the puniſhment of them.

I muſt confeſs, to ſpeak ſtrictly, the degrees and proportions, in which any age grows better or worſe than thoſe that went before it, are not eaſily to be meaſured, unleſs we could live the ſpace of ſeveral ages, and out of our own experience make obſervations and remarks upon them. All that we have to make our eſtimate by, is the hiſtories and records that are left us of the ſtate of former ages, with which we may compare our own; but yet this way

way is often very fallacious, becauſe it is the common humour and cuſtom of men, even of thoſe that tranſmit the memoirs of their own times to poſterity, ſtill to complain of their own times moſt, and to prefer the former ages before that in which they live.

Upon this conſideration I ſhall not be forward to draw a compariſon between the former times and ours, in order to the ſhewing how much greater our ſins are than of thoſe that went before us, and conſequently how much riper we are now for judgment.

Moſt certain it is, that God, as he has done to the ſea, ſo has he to every nation, ſet it bounds of wickedneſs, beyond which they ſhall not paſs; and when their iniquities are at full, he will not fail to repay vengeance into their boſom. The Canaanites, the Jews, and many other nations I might name, have been ſad inſtances of this kind of proceeding.

But when a nation is come to that fatal period, none knows but God; and whether we are not already very near it, we cannot tell, but we ought infinitely to fear.

Too evident it is, that things are in a very bad poſture among us, and our ſins are grown to that height, that it is a miracle of the divine patience and long-ſuffering that we are not already conſumed. Let us be more particular.

If the prevailing of atheiſm in a land, and the contempt of God and religion:

If open lewdneſs and debauchery, and immorality of all kinds:

If the turning religion into a mere piece of formality, and outward profeſſion:

If ſchiſms, and diviſions, and fractions in a church:

And laſtly, if our general unthankfulneſs for, and unprofitableneſs under, the means of grace, and the many mercies and privileges that have been vouchſafed us:

If any, or all of theſe ſins can provoke God to forſake a nation, and give it up to ruin (and yet theſe ſins are both in the ſcripture, and by the ordinary courſe of God's providence eſpecially marked out for ſuch) then are we of this nation at this time in a very deplorable condition, and are to expect judgment without mercy, unleſs it be prevented by a ſpeedy reformation.

For firſt of all, was there ever more atheiſm and irreligion in a chriſtian nation, at leaſt in a proteſtant chriſtian nation; or more countenance given to ſuch doctrines and opinions as directly tend thereto, than now among us?

There are not many, perhaps, that dare in expreſs terms affirm, That there is no God, becauſe they know it is not ſafe ſo to do; but many affirm it by conſequence, by aſſerting ſuch principles, from whence it muſt neceſſarily be concluded.

For what is the conſequence of ſuch doctrines as theſe; That there is nothing but body in the world, and that the very notion of a ſpiritual incorporeal Being implies a contradiction; That there is nothing juſt or unjuſt, virtuous or vicious in itſelf, but as it is made ſo by the laws of the kingdom; That all things come to paſs by a fatal neceſſity, and that no

no man is ſo free an agent as to be capable of rewards and puniſhments for his actions: what is the reſult of theſe doctrines, but the neceſſary introducing of atheiſm, and the baniſhing religion from among men? It being upon theſe principles, not only a needleſs, impertinent, but an abſurd contradictious thing.

And yet are not theſe the avowed principles of too many among us, and thoſe too that are the great pretenders to reaſon and philoſophy?

But what has been the effects of ſuch philoſophy? why, ſuitable enough to the notions of it. You may meet with thoſe that make no ſcruple to ſcoff at God, and every thing that relates to the other world, and to turn into ridicule every thing that is ſacred. And he is accounted the great ſpirit that thinks freely, and dares ſpeak boldly what he thinks. And if a man will ſet up for a wit, he cannot take a more effectual courſe to gain him that reputation in many companies, than to be confident and peremptory in contradicting the common ſentiments of men as to religion, to be able to burleſque the ſcriptures humorouſly, to be dexterous in employing religious phraſes to ſcurrilous purpoſes, and to baffle and droll out of countenance thoſe that ſtand up for the reputation of ſacred things.

As the world goes, it is a piece of virtue to believe a God and Providence, and future rewards and puniſhments, with the other principles of natural religion; they do very well that go thus far. But as for inſtituted revealed religion; for inſtance, chriſtianity, how many are there that think themſelves no way concerned in it, but hold it in the

ſame rank with judaiſm and mahometaniſm? And if they profeſs that, rather than either of theſe, it is only becauſe they were born and bred up in it; it is the religion of the country where they live; but if either of the other ſhould be ſet up in the place of it, they would as willingly conform to that.

One would think that ſuch men as theſe ſhould not be found in a country that calls itſelf chriſtian, much leſs in a chriſtian country that calls itſelf reformed; and yet, ſuch is the infelicity and the fault of ours, that men of theſe principles and practices do abound among us. O bleſſed God! whither ſhall we come at laſt, if timely care be not taken of theſe things?

But ſecondly, if to the atheiſm and infidelity that reigns among us, we add the open profaneneſs and debauchery that is every where to be obſerved in our days, how much blacker will our guilt appear?

Where is that ancient ſerioufneſs, and reſervedneſs, and modeſty, that heretofore has been thought not only eſſential to the ſpirit of a chriſtian, but natural to the temper of an Engliſhman?

Alas! we ſeem to have changed not only our religion, but our climate too: and may, for diſſoluteneſs and luxury, for pride, and vanity, and idleneſs, compare with the ancient Aſiaticks, and do perhaps out-ſtrip ſeveral of our preſent neighbour nations, though of a worſe religion.

But this is not all: ſo much are we degenerated from the ancient ſtrictneſs of chriſtianity, that thoſe things that would not have been named among the firſt chriſtians, without horror, and baniſhing out of their ſociety all thoſe that did them, are frequently

quently practiſed among us. And thoſe vices that, even in the worſt times of chriſtianity, the actors were afraid or aſhamed to own, are now made a matter of ſport and merriment, a trick of youth, a humour, or a frolick. What was then a deed of darkneſs, is now too often done in the face of the ſun; and the perſons concerned in the wickedneſs are ſo far from bluſhing at their guilt, that they relate their own actions as a pleaſant entertainment for their company.

O the riots and drunkenneſs; the frauds and couſenage; the filthy and lewd ſpeeches; the whoredoms and adulteries; the blaſphemous oaths and imprecations that are daily, without any regret, any ſenſe of ſhame, practiſed among us!

We ſeem to have loſt not only the virtue of modeſty, but of hypocriſy too (if ſo bad a thing may be called by ſo good a name.) Thoſe vices and lewdneſſes, which heretofore ſought corners, and wore a maſk, do now appear with a naked face.

It is true, it is to be hoped, that the greateſt part of us are not guilty of ſuch crimes and immoralities as we ſpeak of: but this does not wholly excuſe us; for we are all faulty in this, that theſe kinds of vices are not ſufficiently branded and put out of countenance. They paſs under eaſy, not to ſay creditable names. And ſo little a ſenſe have we of them, that a man may keep his reputation among us, tho' he be never ſo vicious, ſuppoſing that his vices be of the mode of the country. This very thing, without our perſonal guilt, makes the ſin a national ſin; and God will viſit theſe things upon us, except we repent.

But

But to make up the measure of our iniquities, we can, in the third place, live after this dissolute rate, and yet at the same time many of us think ourselves religious: we increase the guilt of our profaneness, by joining formality with it.

If we would disclaim all religion, when we lead such wretched, careless, and sensual lives, it would, in some respects, be more tolerable: for then christianity would not suffer by us, it would get no odium, no ignominy in the world, it would not be an occasion to men to turn atheists.

But to live unchristian lives, and yet to call ourselves christians; nay, to make our religion a sanctuary for our vices, and to think that we may the more freely indulge ourselves in them, because we are of the right religion; this is intolerable, and extremely aggravates the iniquity of our practices. And yet this is a fault that we of this nation are notoriously guilty of.

We often make religion to consist in opinion, and outward profession. If we have but once joined ourselves to that party of christians which we think is the right, and do espouse all their controversies, and are zealous in the observance of their particular forms and rites, whereby they are distinguished from the other sects that are in being among us, we think we are true saints, let our morals be what they will.

This is the religion that is every where too much in fashion. If, for instance, I have listed myself a member of some church of the separation (as there is great variety of them); if I be but true to the principles of my church, and vigorous in opposing those

thoſe that are not of my way; and conſtant in my attendance upon the brethren at their aſſemblies; this zeal of mine will excuſe a multitude of my other failings: and though I now and then uſe indirect ways of dealing in my calling; though I be uncharitable and cenſorious; though I affront authority, and live in a conſtant diſobedience and contempt of the laws of it; yet my fervour for that which I take to be the true religion, and the relation I ſtand in to the people of God, will bear me out as to theſe matters.

On the other ſide, if I be a member of the church of England, I am too often apt to think myſelf in a fair way to heaven, if I be but ſtout for the church, and zealous againſt the ſectaries, and punctual in obſerving the ceremonies of the liturgy, and now and then come to the ſacrament; though it may be I have nothing of the true life and ſpirit of chriſtianity in me, nothing of that ſobriety, and meekneſs, and charity, and inward devotion that our Saviour doth indiſpenſably require of all his followers.

Nay, ſo far from that, it may be I think it is no matter how I live, if I be but a good ſubject to the king, and a true ſon of the church. Nay, it is well if I don't go farther; it is well if I don't make vice and debauchery an eſſential character of a man that is right in his principles; it is well if I don't brand ſerioufneſs of converſation, and a care of one's words and actions, with the name of fanaticiſm, and reproach every one as a puritan, that will not ſwear and drink, and take thoſe unchriſtian liberties that I do.

You

You know there are such men as these frequently to be found in all the several sects and ways of religion among us. But, O! what is become of christianity all the while?

This sure cannot be thy religion, O blessed Jesus! since it is so unlike both thy actions and thy doctrines: Thou never placedst any virtue or praise in knowing, but in doing; in being of this or the other particular external mode of religion; but in believing thy gospel, and following thy example, in mortifying our lusts, and leading a life of peaceableness, and obedience, and humility, and all man- of inward holiness and purity.

How our brethren of the separation will dispose of their members that are of this temper, I know not; but as to all those that pretend to be of our communion, and yet live scandalous lives, and think that their owning themselves for the sons of the church, will make atonement for their immoralities, it is to be feared they have done us more hurt than ever they will do us good. And unless they would reform, it may perhaps be wished that we were rid of them: let them declare themselves fanaticks, papists, any thing, rather than members of the church of England.

And though by their recession, and going over to the enemies camp, we might possibly be so weakened, that we could not support ourselves, but must be forced to fall under our adversaries; yet I do not know whether even then the church would not be the better for it. And, it would perhaps be more desirable to live in a mean, low, afflicted condition, without such company, than to govern the world with it.

But

But fourthly, these are not all the maladies which this distressed church and nation labours under: there is another wound that is as wide, and bleeds as much as any of the rest: And which, if timely care be not taken of it, may cause her expiration as soon as any other.

I mean the unnatural, unchristian feuds and divisions that are amongst us, our nation's being rent and torn into so many parties and factions, and the cruel and bitter animosities with which each party does prosecute the other: And all this, if men would consider, for little things, in comparison, things certainly not worth all this heat, things that the wisest and best of the several dissenting parties confess to be indifferent.

O! how do men, by their foolish and unaccountable divisions, weaken the common interest that all pretend at least to be concerned for! What advantages are hereby given to the adversaries!

It is likely, indeed, that as they first set on foot, so they still continue to foment their differences. They laugh at this opportunity of making proselytes to their religion: and a plentiful harvest they have hereby reaped to themselves.

But where is our wisdom in the mean time? Have men no more understanding, than to be still hot and eager in their contentions about a shadow, when there is an enemy at the gate, that is in a fair way to take from us the substance?

Some, indeed, may be apt to dispute which side ought to comply; whether the dissenters ought to come over to the established church, or the church to them? It is not now a time fully to debate the merits

merits of that cauſe. But this may be truly ſaid, if men would be honeſt and ſincere, and mix no paſſion or worldly concernment with their religion, the point would ſoon be decided on the church's ſide.

Every man that calls himſelf a proteſtant, would think himſelf obliged to obey lawful authority in all things, where he was convinced their commands were not unlawful. And if he could not, with a ſafe conſcience, come up to it in all things, he would come up as far as he could. And as for thoſe things that he was not ſatisfied about, as he would not condemn or cenſure thoſe that were perſuaded, or practiſed otherwiſe, ſo neither would he raiſe any diſturbance in the church, by joining himſelf to an oppoſite party.

And on the other ſide, thoſe that did conform to the church in all things, would not withdraw their charity from their fellow chriſtians, for not doing ſo much as they. Though they differed from them in ſeveral opinions, yet they would join hands with them in all chriſtian offices of mutual love and charity, and in a joint oppoſition of the common enemy.

But alas! things are not thus with us; and I note it as a fault, for which we ought deeply to be affected this day; and if men did duly weigh the ſinfulneſs and the danger that all ſchiſms and ſeparations of this kind do bring upon a nation, they would be thus affected.

If human conjectures about the reaſons and cauſes of divine judgments may be allowed, it will appear from hiſtory and experience, that there has been

been as much war and bloodshed caused in the world, as many nations desolated, as many churches ruined by the malignity and evil influence of this sin of schism, as any other.

And if ever God in judgment shall think fit to give over this flourishing church of ours, as a prey to that mighty hunter, that would erect an universal spiritual monarchy to himself upon the ruins of all the particular churches of Christendom, we should have good reason to believe, that the unnecessary divisions and quarrels among ourselves had a great hand in bringing on the judgment.

In all appearance, we of this nation might be impregnable as to our religion, if those protestants among us, who have been so long separated from the communion of our national church, would once return into its bosom; that we might all heartily join together in loving and assisting one another, and opposing the publick adversary.

But fifthly and lastly, if the state of our church and nation was not near so bad as I have now represented it, yet there is another thing still, that all, even the best of us, have reason to be sensible of, and to mourn for; as that, which of itself is sufficient to bring destruction upon us. And that is, our ingratitude to God for his many mercies and deliverances, and our unprofitableness under those means of grace that he has been pleased so long to afford us.

I cannot call this a particular sin; it is, if you will, an aggravation of all the rest, or all of them summed up together. However, I give it a particular consideration, because it is a thing that God has

has ſet a mark upon, and has ſo far declared his diſpleaſure againſt it, that he has determined it a juſt cauſe to unpeople or unchurch a nation.

Our Saviour tells us, that when a certain man had planted a fig-tree in his vineyard, and came and ſought fruit thereon, and found none, he ſaid unto the dreſſer of his vineyard, [c] *Behold theſe three years I come, ſeeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none; cut it down, why doth it cumber the ground?*

Let us apply this parable to ourſelves, as certainly the reaſon of it will ſufficiently prompt us. Was ever fig-tree or vineyard more curiouſly planted, more carefully dreſſed, more richly manured, more ſecurely fenced from the outrages of beaſts of prey, than our fig-tree, our vineyard, the church of England? For of a church this parable is neceſſarily to be underſtood.

Is there any one of the proteſtant churches in Europe, that has been ſo regularly reformed; that in the firſt conſtitution of it was eſtabliſhed upon principles ſo juſtifiable, ſo agreeable with the laws of nature and chriſtianity, and the civil rights of the kingdom, as this church of England was?

Is there any proteſtant church in Europe, whoſe aricles of faith, whoſe diſcipline, whoſe manner and rites of worſhip are more correſpondent to ancient tradition, and catholick doctrine and practice?

Is there any proteſtant church in Europe, wherein the word of God has been taught more ſincerely, and more to the edification of the people, than among us?

Is there any proteſtant church, that has more comfortably lived under their own vines, and their own

[c] Luke xiii. 6.

own fig-trees, has more freely enjoyed all the benefits and privileges that either religion or their birthright could entitle them to, than we have done?

Is there any proteſtant church, that has been preſerved ſo miraculouſly, that hath received ſo many wonderful deliverances from enemies of all ſorts? enemies of the hills and of the vallies? And yet notwithſtanding all; notwithſtanding the contrivances of falſe brethren within ourſelves and the aſſaults of the publick adverſaries abroad, does ſtill not only continue in being, but flouriſheth alſo, as, God be thanked, we do at this day?

The care that God hath taken of this nation hath been wonderful: His providences towards us are to be admired for the rareneſs and the graciouſneſs of them. And therefore juſtly may the Lord of the vineyard, after all this care, all theſe providences, expect ſome good fruit from us, proportionable to his kindneſs to us. And long has he waited for it.

But what fruits have we produced after all theſe great opportunities, and this great patience? Can we really ſay that we are now better than our forefathers of the reformation, who, perhaps, had not more light, certainly had not that experience of God's mercies and deliverances that we have? I am afraid our hearts will give it againſt us.

Can we ſay that we are not worſe than they? That we have, at leaſt, made as good an uſe and improvement of the talents that have been committed to us, as they did? It is to be feared we ſhall be caſt upon this point alſo.

Our own experience will tell us, if we have lived any conſiderable time in the world, that even ſince our remembrance, though God hath more and more

more both heaped his favours and his ſeverities upon us, yet we have grown worſe and worſe.

His mercies have not melted us; his judgments have not reclaimed us; he hath done all that is poſſible, both by gentle and ſevere methods, to bring us to a ſenſe of our duty; but we, like the deaf adder, *have ſtopped our ears, and have not hearkened to the voice of the charmer, though he charmed never ſo wiſely.*

What therefore, theſe things conſidered, can we expect, but that God ſhould paſs the ſame ſentence upon this unthankful, this irreclaimable people of England, that the Lord of the vineyard paſſed upon the fig-tree in the parable, *Cut it down, why doth it cumber the ground?*

Or, if you will, take it in the words of the prophet, what ſhould hinder, or what can we expect, but that God ſhould ſpeak to us (that is, decree upon us) what he did to his beloved people, in the fifth of Iſaiah's prophecy, *O inhabitants of Jeruſalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard. What could I have done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore then, when I looked that it ſhould bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to, I will tell you what I will do with my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it ſhall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it ſhall be troden down; and I will lay it waſte; it ſhall not be pruned or digged, but there ſhall come up briars and thorns.*

II. This

II. This is the judgment that is here threatened in the text, which I now come, in the ſecond place, more particularly to conſider.

A grievous judgment without doubt it is, and the greateſt that can fall upon any nation: for ſo much as our ſouls are of greater concernment to us than our bodies, ſo much are ſpiritual mercies to be preferred before temporals: and ſo much the greater miſery is it for any people to be deprived of them, than of the other.

For that nation, which was once God's own peculiar people, to be abandoned by him, and to be laid in common with the reſt of the world that are under the prince of the power of the air; for that nation, that once enjoyed the influences of God's preſence, and the light of the truth, and the benefits of his ordinances, now to be ſtript of all theſe; to be without God, without light, without the ordinary means of ſaving their ſouls: O what more deplorable condition can be imagined!

And yet thus ſevere hath God been with many nations: thus when their ſins have cried aloud, and the ſinners have been impudent, and all methods of amendment have been ineffectual, God hath in anger removed their candleſtick from among them.

The church of Epheſus which Chriſt thus threatens in the text, nay, all the other ſix churches of Aſia, to which the epiſtles are ſent, are ſad inſtances of this. Once moſt flouriſhing churches they were, even the very paradiſe of the Lord; but now they lie waſte and deſolate, overrun with ignorance, and barbarity, and mahometaniſm.

That

That Africa, which is not now more fruitful of monſters, than it was once of excellently wiſe and learned men; that Africa, which formerly afforded us our Clemens, our Origen, our Tertullian, our Cyprian, our Auguſtine, and many other extraordinary lights in the church of God; that famous Africa, in whoſe ſoil chriſtianity did thrive ſo prodigiouſly, and could boaſt of ſo many flouriſhing churches, alas! is now a wilderneſs. *The wild boars have broken into the vineyard and eaten it up, and it brings forth nothing but briars and thorns:* to uſe the words of the prophet.

And who knows but God may ſuddenly make this church and nation, this our England, which, Jeſhurun-like, is *waxed fat and grown proud, and has kicked againſt God*, ſuch another example of the vengeance of this kind?

It is true, in all appearance there is no danger of having our candleſtick removed from us in the ſame ſenſe or manner that thoſe churches, I have inſtanced in, had theirs. We have no apprehenſions that either mahometaniſm or paganiſm will come into theſe kingdoms: at leaſt not in our days.

It is another kind of removal of our candleſtick that we have reaſon to fear: it is another religion nigher at hand that is moſt likely to diſplace our candleſtick.

You all know what religion I mean: it is popery that moſt threatens us. It is that reſtleſs buſy religion that has made ſo much diſturbance in Chriſtendom; that has always been and is ſtill ſo active by all means, juſt or unjuſt, by fraud or force, to inſinuate

ſinuate itſelf into all places. It is this we ought to have the moſt apprehenſions of.

It is true, thoſe that are of this religion do profeſs the name of Chriſt, and we do not deny them the title of a chriſtian church: but of all ſorts of chriſtianity this ſeems to be the worſt; and next to the being of no church, it is the leaſt deſirable to be of this.

And for all the ſpecious titles of viſible and perpetual and catholick and infallible, which they would amuſe us with; if we did ſeriouſly conſider what a kind of religion we now enjoy, and what a kind of religion will come into the place of it, if ever they get their will of us, we ſhould ſadly reflect upon the change. And for all we continued a chriſtian country, yet we ſhould lament over ourſelves that our *candleſtick was removed out of its place.*

I believe there are few here but ſufficiently underſtand what a kind of religion this is, and what you are to expect from it: but yet I will beg leave to give a brief account of ſome of the articles of it. Not to inſtruct you, but to give you occaſion to conſider how well it will ſuit with us of this kingdom, or indeed with any that would be chriſtians after the way of Chriſt's inſtitution.

It is a religion, whoſe avowed principles are to keep their people in ignorance as much as they can: for with them ignorance is the mother of devotion.

And if you do but blindly believe as the church believes, and blindly obey what is impoſed upon you, you are good catholicks.

It

It is a religion, in which you will not be allowed to have any prayers in publick that you can underſtand. When you come to the church, you may entertain yourſelves with ſaying over your Roſary (which is a ſolemn ſet of prayers containing ten addreſſes to the virgin Mary for one to our Lord) and other private prayers, if you have them; but join in the publick ſervice with the miniſter you cannot, unleſs you underſtand Latin.

It is a religion, into which as ſoon as you enter, you muſt give up your bibles: for the people muſt not read the ſcripture without eſpecial licence, and not at all of that tranſlation you now have of it.

It is a religion that robs you of half the ſacrament: for you muſt never be allowed to receive the cup in the Lord's ſupper; notwithſtanding the inſtitution of our Lord in expreſs words: and notwithſtanding the practice of the primitive church to the contrary.

It is a religion, in which you are ſo far from being permitted *to try all things and to hold to that which is good*, according to the apoſtle's command; that you muſt wholly ſubmit your reaſon and underſtanding to the dictates of an infallible judge, even ſo far (if one of their greateſt authors ſay true [f]) as to be bound to believe virtue to be bad, and vice to be good, if it ſhall pleaſe his holineſs to ſay ſo.

Nay, it is a religion, in which you ſhall not be allowed to believe your very ſenſes; for though four of your five ſenſes tell you that one of the conſecrated elements in the ſacrament is a piece of bread, yet you are obliged, under pain of damnation, to believe

[f] Bellar. de Roman. Pontif. lib. 4. cap. 5.

believe that it is not so, but the very body of Christ that was crucified at Jerusalem, and is now in heaven; and which, upon this supposition, must be actually and separately present in a thousand distant places at once every day.

It is a religion that will bring you back to the old paganish idolatry, or to that which is as near it as can be. For as the old heathens had their inferior deities, their dæmons, and heroes to be mediators between God and them; so will you have your several saints and patrons of the like nature, which you must apply to for the recommending your prayers to the Divine Majesty: and, as they had the images of their gods and mediators to worship and fall down before; so you will also, for the same purpose, have the images of the blessed Trinity, and the virgin Mary, and the rest of the saints.

It is true, the pagans were mightily reproved for these things, both in the scripture and by the primitive christians. And they made several defences and apologies for their practices. And the very same doth the church of Rome now make for her invocation of saints, and image-worship. But if the one were guilty of idolatry, there is little doubt but the others are so also: for there is not an hair's breadth difference between the pleas and apologies that each party makes for itself.

Nay, it is a religion that will engage you in a more unnatural idolatry than ever the pagans were guilty of. Cicero [g], that was a heathen himself, and knew as much of that religion as any man living did; yet affirms, that there was none so mad in any



[g] De Nat. Deor. l. 3.

of the religions of his time as to pretend to eat his God: but yet this you must do in that religion every time you receive the sacrament: and the priest does it every day when he says mass: for he eats that which himself and you all must worship. And you are taught to believe, that what you worship in the mass is God, that is, the very humanity of our Saviour united personally to his Divinity.

It is true, in this religion there are many advantages and conveniences pretended that you cannot really have in the religion you now profess. But look you to them, whether they will prove so in the event.

The easy ways they have to reconcile sinners to God, even after the most vicious life, by the means of the sacrament of penance, as it is commonly taught and administred in that church; together with the liberty you may take in the choice of such a confessor as you think will be most favourable to your case. Add to this, the virtue of indulgences, and masses for the dead. As also the efficacy of pilgrimages, reliques, and holy garments, *&c.* for the purging of sins.

All these things put together, may perhaps rid you of a great many uneasinesses, and scruples, and pangs of conscience, with which you might otherwise be troubled; and which would not be so easily cured in the way that you are now in. There is little doubt but upon the commonly received principles of that religion, you may go to heaven upon much easier terms than you can upon ours: but yet for all that, in a business of such consequence as the salvation

tion of a man's ſoul is, it is good to make a ſerious enquiry, whether of the two ways is the ſafer.

But there is one thing in this religion which will not ſo eaſily go down with Engliſhmen: and that is, that you cannot therein be any longer good ſubjects to your prince, than his holineſs will give you leave.

If his majeſty ſhould be a heretick (as it is certain his preſent majeſty is, in their account) nay, in other caſes beſides that of hereſy, the pope has power to depoſe him, and abſolve his ſubjects from their allegiance: and not not only in the judgment of their moſt famous caſuiſts, and by the eſtabliſhed rules of their canon law, but by the decree of an infallible general council: and it has been a frequent practice of the pope to make uſe of his power in this way.

Nay, in this kingdom of England he needs not ſtay for ſuch pretences: for his holineſs (as appears upon record) has declared, that this kingdom is held in fee of the papacy; and that whoever wears the crown here, is their vaſſal, and conſequently may be turned out at pleaſure.

What the effects of theſe doctrines have been, we of this kingdom have had ſufficient experience ſince the reformation; not to mention the troubles they have given us in former times. The inſtances are ſo many and ſo very well known, that I need not name them: but if they were all forgot, the late, ſhall I ſay? or the preſent popiſh plot, for the taking away the life of his ſacred majeſty, and ſubverting the proteſtant religion, and the eſtabliſhed government of this kingdom, now brought to light;

this alone, though all the other inſtances were worn out of memory, would ſufficiently ſhew us what we are to expect from theſe Roman principles, as to the ſecurity either of our prince, or our liberties, or our religion.

But bleſſed be God's name, that this curſed deſign has been hitherto defeated; and we are here to praiſe him for it, and to pray to him for a further diſcovery of it.

And bleſſed be his name, that he hath given us this remarkable evidence that he has not yet abandoned us, notwithſtanding our manifold provocations. Certainly this extraordinary providence of God towards us, is one of the moſt comfortable arguments that we can draw to ourſelves, that God has yet ſome pity for this nation, if we will but pity ourſelves.

And laſtly, Bleſſed be God's name, that this mercy has already had this good effect upon us, that we are awakened into a more lively ſenſe of the manifold iniquity and miſchief and danger of the popiſh religion and party.

What is now further to be deſired, but that the iſſue of things among us may be ſuitable to theſe beginnings?

God has once more given this nation a great opportunity for the eſtabliſhing her tottering candleſtick, and who knows whether ever the like will be offered again?

It therefore infinitely concerns all of us, eſpecially you, to whom the managery of publick affairs is committed, to improve this preſent opportunity to the good purpoſes for which it was given; that

that ſo this great mercy and providence of God be not loſt upon us.

Offences may come, and we may be diſappointed: but, as our Saviour ſaid, *Wo be that man, by whom the offence cometh.* Such a man will never be able to anſwer it, either to God or his country, or at laſt to his own conſcience.

O may God ſo inſpire you with the ſpirit of wiſdom and counſel; with temper and moderation; with a ſpirit ſo diſengaged from private ends and intereſts, ſo unbiaſſed by particular faction, and ſo wholly intent upon the publick good, that you may be the bleſſed inſtruments of healing all the diſtempers we groan under; and of deriving upon us thoſe bleſſings, which we this day pray for!

That by your means atheiſm and contempt of religion, as alſo lewdneſs and debauchery of all kinds, may be ſo diſcouraged, that they ſhall not dare to appear with an open face.

That by your means a ſtop may be put to the ſcandalous ſchiſms and diviſions that are among us; that, if it be poſſible, we may ſerve God with one heart and with one mind.

That by your means, not only the perſon of his ſacred majeſty, and the rights of his crown, may be ſecured againſt all wicked attempts, whether of papiſts or others; but alſo that upon his head the crown may be ſo ſupported, and ſo flouriſh, that we may at leaſt be in a condition not to fear the malice or the power of any foreign enemy.

Laſtly, That by your means as effectual proviſion as poſſible may be made, both for the keeping out that foreign religion, which, as we have ſeen,

ſo little ſerves the ends of chriſtianity, and ſo much differves the intereſt both of king and people: and for the more firm eſtabliſhment of the proteſtant religion of the church of England; that ſo our preſent candleſtick may be continued to our poſterity, and they as well as we may have reaſon to bleſs God for you.

III. But in order to the procuring thoſe great bleſſings to the kingdom, there is a duty neceſſary to be performed by all of us in our private capacities, which is here ſpecified in the text, viz. repentance. *I will come unto thee quickly*, ſays our Saviour, *and will remove thy candleſtick out of its place, except thou repent.* Which repentance, how it ought to be performed by us, is the third and laſt thing I am to ſpeak to.

But becauſe I would not exceed the ordinary limits of a ſermon, I ſhall only mention the heads of thoſe things which upon this occaſion are proper to be inſiſted on.

If we would repent ſincerely of our ſins, ſo as to do our parts towards the prevention of thoſe judgments that hang over our heads, and the procuring thoſe bleſſings we ſtand in need of; it will be neceſſary that every one of us do deeply humble and afflict our ſouls before God for our own ſins, the ſins which we have in perſon committed, devoutly confeſſing them, and begging of God, that when he makes inquiſition for a national guilt, he would not remember them, nor let the publick ſuffer any thing upon our account.

It is alſo neceſſary that we be duly ſenſible of the common ſins of others, ſo as to repent of them alſo: lament-

lamenting before God the corruptions of the times; the publick faſhionable vices of the age. This was the ſpirit of David, who was concerned for the faults of others as well as his own: *Rivers of tears*, ſaith he, *run down my eyes becauſe men keep not thy law.*

Nay further, in order to a national repentance, we are obliged to confeſs to God the ſins of our forefathers, and pray for the forgiveneſs of them alſo. What my own former private ſins are to me at preſent with reſpect to my perſonal capacity; the ſame are the ſins of our fathers to us all, conſidered as a nation or people, who are to repent as well of the paſt as of the preſent ſins of the land. This is the rule that God himſelf hath preſcribed for a publick repentance. And for not putting that rule in practice, the people of the Jews, in our Saviour's time, ſeverely ſuffered: for upon the *men of that generation* (as our Saviour had threatened [h]) *was revenged all the righteous blood ſhed in the land, from the blood of Abel, to the blood of Zachariah*, though yet none of that blood was ſhed by that generation. Great reaſon therefore have we at this day ſeriouſly to put up to God that petition which we ſo often repeat in our litany, *Remember not, Lord, our offences, nor the offences of our forefathers; but ſpare us, good Lord, ſpare thy people, whom thou haſt redeemed with thy moſt precious blood, and be not angry with us for ever.*

But to make this repentance ſuch as it ought to be, there is further required a thorough change in our hearts and minds; ſo that as we confeſs and aſk pardon for the faults of our lives, we ſhould alſo



[h] Matt. xxiii. 35.

amend them. Without this, all our ceremonious humiliation will ſignify nothing.

Nay, we muſt not only reform ourſelves, but do what we can in our ſpheres towards the reforming of others: and every one of us might do a great deal, if we would, though it was but in this one thing, in heartily diſcouraging ſcandalous and open ſins wherever we meet with them; ſo far as it may be done without breach of reſpect to our ſuperiors, or forfeiture of common prudence. If vice had once an ill name in the world, was once generally ſtigmatized with reproach and ignominy, it would quickly loſe its empire, and thouſands that are now the ſlaves of it, would become proſelytes to virtue.

But further, if we truly fear the judgment I have been ſpeaking of, and by our repentance would prevent it, let us make this particular expreſſion of that repentance, viz. Let us ſet a great value upon the religion we at preſent enjoy: let us in all our actions ſhew a great zeal and concernment for it, and do what we can both towards the continuing and promoting it.

If every one of us in his way would but expreſs half that zeal, and induſtry, and diligence in the cauſe of our religion, that we ſee our adverſaries do, we ſhould probably, in a very little time, ſee a quite different face of things; and ſhould not only put a ſtop to their preſent ſucceſſes, but gain ſo much ground upon them, as to caſt them into deſpair of ever making a conqueſt of this nation. But here is the miſery, we are ſo confident and ſecure of the goodneſs of our cauſe, that we think it will

ſupport

ſupport itſelf without any help of ours. Let us in this point learn wiſdom from our enemies.

But eſpecially, let us practiſe heartily thoſe virtues which our religion peculiarly teaches us, as oppoſed to popery. Let us be meek, and gentle, and long-ſuffering, even to thoſe that differ in opinion from us. Let us hate all tricks, and devices, and equivocations, both in our words and our carriage. Let us be conſtantly and inflexibly loyal to our prince, and let no conſideration in the world make us violate our allegiance to him.

To all which, let us, in the laſt place, add our earneſt and conſtant prayers to God, that he would be pleaſed to take pity of us: To avert the judgments we are threatened with, and continue the mercies we have hitherto enjoyed: that he would protect our religion, and make it to flouriſh more and more: that he would preſerve our king, our government, our laws: and in order thereunto, that he would influence and direct all the publick councils, eſpecially the great council of the nation now aſſembled in parliament, that this ſeſſion of theirs may have a happy and a glorious iſſue. Which God of his mercy grant, *&c.*

# SERMON II.

## The duty of Subjection to the Higher Powers.

TIT. iii. 1.

*Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates.*

YOU all know what kind of argument this day calls for: for by the design of keeping it, the business that the preacher hath to do, is to press obedience and subjection to the government we live under, and to preach against faction and rebellion. And accordingly it is prescribed in the rubrick of this day's service, that if there be a sermon at all, and not a homily, it shall be upon this argument.

It is very well that authority hath taken care, that at some solemn times we should preach upon this subject in a more solemn manner: because, though it

it be as needful as any, yet there are ſome among us that think it a very improper theme for the pulpit. I muſt confeſs, I had an eye to this ſuggeſtion, when I pitched upon theſe words which I have now read to you; becauſe I think there is ſomething to be obſerved in them, which will effectually confute it.

St. Paul here lays his charge upon Titus, that he ſhould put the people that were under his care *in mind, to be ſubject to principalities and powers, and to obey magiſtrates.*

Two things I would here conſider: firſt, the perſon that is ordered thus to put the people in mind: and ſecondly, the thing that he is to put them in mind of, which is, ſubjection and obedience to principalities and powers, and magiſtrates.

I begin with the firſt thing, the perſon, to whom St. Paul writes this epiſtle; and to whom he gives it in charge, that he ſhould *put the people in mind, to be ſubject.*

Who was this perſon? Why it was Titus, an eccleſiaſtick, a biſhop, a preacher of the goſpel; not a layman, not a magiſtrate, but a pure churchman. What can be more plainly gathered from hence than this; that it is not foreign to a clergyman's office to preach obedience and ſubmiſſion to the government; but, on the contrary, a part of his function, a neceſſary duty incumbent upon him to do it. If any man affirm otherwiſe, he muſt either ſay, that St. Paul did not rightly inſtruct Titus in his office, but enjoined him to do that which he had nothing to do with; or he muſt ſhew, that the caſe of Titus was different from that of the miniſters

of

of the gospel at this day. Neither of which things can, I believe, be easily made out.

And yet, in such times are we fallen, that it is taken ill by many, that ministers should, in their pulpit-discourses, meddle with these matters. I must confess, I think, that of all men, it most concerns a minister of religion not to be a busy-body, or a meddler in other mens matters, for, in truth, he hath work enough to do of his own; and such kind of work too, as, let him behave himself as inoffensively as he can, will create him difficulties and enemies enough. And therefore it would be very imprudent in him to usurp other mens provinces, and to burn his fingers where he needs not; especially, considering that the success of his labours and endeavours among the people doth in a great measure depend upon the good liking they have of him.

But what is it that gives offence? or what is it that renders this argument we are speaking of, so improper a subject for a clergyman to treat of? Why, several things are pretended, and I shall name some of them.

First, it is said, that the work of a clergyman, is to instruct men in Christ's religion, to preach against vice and sin, and to preach up holiness and good life, and mutual love and charity: but what has he to do with state affairs, as matters of government are?

I answer, he hath nothing, indeed, to do with them; but his only work is to make men good christians, by endeavouring to possess them with a hearty belief of our Saviour's doctrines and promises, and persuading them to a conformity in their lives

lives to his precepts. This is our proper work, and this is that we ought to attend to all the days of our life; and with government and ſtate affairs we ought not to meddle, in our ſermons eſpecially.

But then, after all this, it doth not follow, but that we are all bound, as we have occaſion, to preach up loyalty and obedience to our governors. For this is no ſtate affair, but an affair of the goſpel. We cannot inſtruct men in Chriſt's religion, without inſtructing them in this.

If, indeed, it was an indifferent thing to a man's chriſtianity, or to his ſalvation, whether he was a good or a bad ſubject; then, indeed, it would be as indifferent to a preacher, whether he inſiſted on theſe things to the people: but it is not ſo.

One great branch of chriſtian holineſs, as it is declared in the New-teſtament, is, that every one demean himſelf quietly, and peaceably, and obediently to the government he lives under; and that not only for wrath, or fear of puniſhment, but alſo for conſcience ſake. And this is made as neceſſary a condition of going to heaven, as any other particular virtue is. And therefore, if we will inſtruct men in Chriſt's religion, and in the indiſpenſable points of holineſs required thereby, we muſt inſtruct them in this alſo.

One great vice and damnable ſin, that the religion of our Lord has cautioned againſt, is the ſin of factiouſneſs and rebellion: and therefore, if it be our duty to declare againſt the ſins and vices that are contrary to chriſtianity, it is our duty to declare and caution againſt this alſo.

Laſtly,

Laſtly, we do readily grant, that a great part of our office conſiſts in moſt affectionately recommending and preſſing the neceſſity of mutual love and charity. But if this be neceſſary, is it not more ſo, to recommend and preſs obedience to authority, without which mutual love and charity cannot poſſibly ſubſiſt? that being the common ligament of them; and take away that, we ſhould be no better than bears and tygers one to another.

But it is ſaid, in the ſecond place, that preachers ought not to meddle with theſe points, becauſe they are not competent judges of them: they do not know the meaſures and limits of loyalty and diſloyalty, of being a good, and a bad ſubject: theſe depending altogether upon the conſtitution of the government we live under; and the determining of them belongs to the civil courts, and not to their profeſſion.

To this I anſwer, that in all thoſe inſtances, wherein this argument falls under the cognizance and determination of parliaments, or judges, or lawyers, we do not pretend to meddle with it: and if any man do, let him anſwer for himſelf. All that we pretend to, is to preſs the plain, general, indiſpenſable duties of obedience to laws, and of peaceableneſs and ſubjection to the higher powers, which Chriſt and his apoſtles have every where taught in the bible.

If, indeed, a preacher ſhould in the pulpit preſume to give his judgment about the management of publick affairs; or to lay down doctrines, as from Chriſt, about the forms and models of kingdoms or commonwealths; or to adjuſt the limits of the pre-

rogative of the prince, or of the liberties of the ſubject in our preſent government: I ſay, if a divine ſhould meddle with ſuch matters as theſe in his ſermons, I do not know how he can be excuſed from the juſt cenſure of meddling with things that nothing concern him. This is, indeed, a practiſing in ſtate matters, and is uſurping an office that belongs to another profeſſion, and to men of another character. And I ſhould account it every whit as indecent in a clergyman to take upon him to deal in theſe points, as it would be for him to determine titles of land in the pulpit, which are in diſpute in Weſtminſter-hall.

But what is this to the preaching obedience and ſubjection to the eſtabliſhed government? Let meddling with politicks be as odious as you pleaſe in a clergyman, yet ſure it muſt not only be allowed to him, but be thought his duty, to exhort all ſubjects to be faithful to their prince, to live peaceably under his government, and to obey all the laws that are made by juſt authority; and even where they cannot obey them, yet to ſubmit, and to raiſe no diſturbance to the publick upon that account. And this is the great thing which we ſay clergymen have to do in this matter.

We meddle not with politicks; we meddle not with prerogative or property; we meddle not with the diſputes and controverſies of law that may ariſe about theſe matters; but we preach a company of plain leſſons of peaceableneſs, and fidelity, and ſubmiſſion to our rulers; ſuch as the law of nature teaches, ſuch as both Chriſt and his apoſtles did preach in all places wherever they came; and ſuch

as

as will at this day hold in all the governments of the world, whether they be kingdoms or commonwealths.

And if at any time we make a particular application of theſe general rules to our own eſtabliſhed government, it is only in ſuch inſtances as are plainly of the eſſence of our national conſtitution; in ſuch inſtances as are plainly contained in the oaths of allegiance and ſupremacy, and thoſe other teſts, which, for the ſecurity of the government, the law hath taken care that ſubjects ſhall ſwear to, and conſequently muſt be thought obliged both to underſtand and practiſe them. And how can it be an invaſion of another man's office, to preach and inſiſt upon ſuch things as theſe? No, certainly, what is the duty of every ſubject both to underſtand and practiſe in order to his ſalvation, that, without doubt, it is the duty of their paſtors to put them in mind of.

But, thirdly, It is ſaid further, that preachers cannot engage in theſe arguments, but they will of neceſſity ſide with ſome party or faction among us: now they ſhould have nothing to do with parties or factions.

To this I anſwer, that to be on the ſide of the eſtabliſhed government, and to endeavour to maintain that, is not to be a favourer of parties and factions: but they are the factions, they are the ſetters up, or abettors of parties, who endeavour to deſtroy, or unſettle, or diſparage, or in the leaſt to hurt and weaken the government, and the laws, as they are eſtabliſhed, let the principles upon which they go, or the pretences they

make, be what they will. So that a miniſter, by preaching obedience and ſubjection, doth not, in the leaſt, make himſelf of any party; but, on the contrary, he ſets himſelf againſt all parties: and ſo he ought to do; for his buſineſs is, to be on the ſide of the government as it is by law eſtabliſhed; and as vigorouſly as in him lies, in ſuch ways as are proper for his function, to oppoſe all thoſe that would either ſecretly undermine it, or openly aſſault it: in a word, all thoſe that would make any change or innovation in it (by whatever names they are diſcriminated) by any other means or methods, than what the law of the land, and the nature of the conſtitution doth allow.

And thus much of the firſt thing I took notice of in the text, viz. the perſon, to whom the charge is here given, that *he ſhould put the people in mind.* I now come, in the ſecond place, to the thing he was to put them in mind of; and that is, *to be ſubject to principalities and powers, and to obey magiſtrates.*

And here two things are to be enquired into; firſt, Who are thoſe principalities and powers, and magiſtrates, to whom we are to be ſubject, and whom we are to obey? And, ſecondly, Wherein conſiſts that ſubjection and obedience that we are to give them?

As for the firſt of theſe, who are the principalities and powers, and magiſtrates? Why, certainly, by theſe words are meant the ſupreme civil governors of every nation; and under them their ſubordinate officers. Let the form of government, in any country, be what it will; in whomſoever the ſovereign authority is lodged (whether in one or in many) they are the principalities and powers, to whom

whom we are to be ſubject; and thoſe that are commiſſioned and deputed to exerciſe authority under them, are the magiſtrates, whom we are to obey.

St. Peter, in the ſecond chapter of his firſt epiſtle, doth thus expreſs them (alluding, no doubt, to the government of the Roman ſtate, under which he lived, which was then monarchical) *Submit yourſelves*, ſaith he, πάσῃ ἀνθρωπίνῃ κτίσει, to every *human conſtitution for the Lord's ſake: whether it be to the king, as ſupreme; or unto the governors, as unto them that are ſent by him——for ſo is the will of God.* Upon which words of his, the homily of our church, appointed to be read on this day, doth thus gloſs:

" St. Peter doth not ſay, Submit yourſelves unto me, as ſupreme head of the church: neither, ſaith he, ſubmit yourſelves, from time to time, to my ſucceſſors in Rome: but he ſaith, ſubmit yourſelves unto your king, your ſupreme head, and to thoſe that he appointeth in authority under him. This is God's ordinance, this is God's holy will, that the whole body, in every realm, and all the members and parts of the ſame, ſhall be ſubject to their head, their king."

As for the ſubjection and obedience that is to be paid to theſe principalities and powers, which is the other thing I am to enquire into, it conſiſts of a great many particulars. It implies in it, for inſtance, that we ſhould give all honour, reſpect, and reverence to their perſons, looking upon them (which really they are) as God's vicegerents upon earth.

That we ſhould not raſhly cenſure their actions, or the adminiſtration of their government.

That

That we ſhould at no hand deſpiſe them, or ſpeak evil of them, remembering the character that St. Jude gives of thoſe that *deſpiſe dominions, and ſpeak evil of dignities.*

That as we ſhould make prayers, and ſupplications, and interceſſions, and giving of thanks for all men; ſo more eſpecially for them, and thoſe that are put in authority under them, as St. Paul teaches us.

That we ſhould pay them the tributes and cuſtoms that are due to them, as the ſame apoſtle expreſſes it; that is, the expences we are legally taxed at, towards the ſupport of their government.

That we ſhould, according to our power, maintain their *jura majeſtatis*, the rights and prerogatives belonging, by the conſtitution, to their office and dignity.

That we ſhould aſſiſt and defend them againſt their enemies.

That we ſhould behave ourſelves peaceably and modeſtly in our particular vocations, endeavouring to make their government as eaſy and as happy as we can; but at no hand to invade any publick office that belongs not to us.

In a word, that we ſhould yield obedience to all their laws. And in caſe it ever happen that we cannot with a ſafe conſcience obey, there we are patiently to ſuffer the penalties of our diſobedience, but by no means either to affront their perſons, or to diſturb their government, by raiſing or partaking in any tumult, or inſurrection, or rebellion.

All this that I have now named, is contained in that duty of ſubjection and obedience which we are here bid to pay to principalities and powers, as might eaſily be ſhewn, as to every particular: but I will not

not tire you by running through all these heads, and therefore shall only desire leave to speak a little to the two last things I have now mentioned; both because they are the most general, and do in a manner comprehend the rest; and because they seem principally intended in the text I am now discoursing of. *Put them in mind* (saith St. Paul) *to be subject*, and *put them in mind to obey*. In the one phrase seems to be intimated the duty of active obedience to the laws and orders of our governors: in the other phrase, our submission where we cannot obey.

And first of all, as for the business of active obedience (for it is proper to begin with that first) all that is needful to be said for the clearing of it, may be comprised in these four following propositions:

1st, That the standing laws of every country, are the rule of the subject's obedience, and not merely the will of the prince.

Where, indeed, the legislative and the executive power are both in one hand (as it is in those we call absolute monarchies) there the will of the prince stands for law. But where people are so happy as to live under a legal establishment, as ours is, there the publick laws must govern and steer their actions, and not the prince's private pleasure: so that, tho' *the king can do no wrong* (as our maxim is) yet the subject is answerable for every thing he doth against law, even when he doth it by the king's command.

2dly, Whatever laws are made by just authority, whether in civil matters, or in matters relating to religion, if they be not contrary to God's laws, there the subject is bound in conscience to obey them, even though he apprehends they are inconvenient.

I own,

I own, indeed, that the matter of ſome laws may be of ſo ſmall importance, that a man ſhall not need much to charge his conſcience with the obſervance of them, it being enough that he ſubmit to the penalty, in caſe of tranſgreſſion; and, perhaps, the government never meant to extend their obligation farther: but, for all that, it is in the power of the legiſlative, when there is reaſon, to bind our conſciences to obedience, as well as to award puniſhments to our diſobedience. And the reaſon of this is evident; becauſe we are bound by the laws of God, who hath the ſupreme dominion over our conſciences, to obey our lawful governors in lawful things.

Nay, I ſay farther (which is my third propoſition) that even where we doubt of the lawfulneſs of their commands, we are bound to obey; ſo long as we only doubt of their lawfulneſs, but are not perſuaded that they are unlawful.

For certainly the authority of our governors ought to over-rule any man's private doubts. There is all the reaſon in the world that it ſhould do ſo: and there is no good reaſon to be urged to the contrary.

Pray, what is it we mean, when we ſay, that a man doubts concerning a thing, whether it be lawful or no? Is it not this; that his judgment is kept ſuſpended between equal probabilities on both ſides of a queſtion? He is inclined by ſome reaſons to believe that the thing is lawful; and he is inclined by other reaſons to believe that the thing is unlawful: and theſe reaſons do appear ſo equally probable to him on both ſides, that he doth not know how to determine

termine himself: he doth not know which way he should frame a judgment about the point in question.

This is the notion of a doubt. Now, in such a case as this, when authority interposeth, and declareth itself on one side, and pronounceth not only that the thing is lawful to be done, but also, that it will have it done; and accordingly lays its commands upon the man to do it; I say, if there be not so much weight in authority as to turn the scale in such a case as this, and to oblige a man to act in obedience to it, it is the lightest thing in the world, and signifies very little as to the influencing the affairs of mankind.

But, fourthly, and lastly, if the matter be out of doubt, if a man be really convinced that the thing which authority commands him, is not lawful in itself, but is contradictory to the laws of God; in that case he must not do the thing commanded; on the contrary, he is bound to forbear the practice of it.

If any human law, let it be made by the best authority upon earth, should command us to believe any point in matters of faith, which we are persuaded to be contrary to the revelation of Christ and his apostles; or should command us to profess and declare our belief of any matter whatsoever, though never so indifferent, when yet we did not really believe it; or lastly, should oblige us to the doing of any action, which we did in our own conscience judge to be a transgression of a divine command: I say, in none of these cases are we to yield obedience to the law, by what authority soever it was enacted. And the reason is plain: we must always chuse to obey God

God rather than men. Where God's law hath commanded us, there no human law can abſolve us from the obligation: where God's law hath forbidden us, there no human law can lay obligations upon us.

And it is the ſame thing as to our practice, that we believe God's law hath tied us up, as if it had really done ſo: ſo that, whether we are really in the right, or in the wrong, as to our perſuaſions in theſe matters, we muſt not act againſt them, becauſe we muſt not act againſt our conſciences: only this we are to remember, that it extremely concerns us rightly to inform our conſciences in theſe matters, where human laws have interpoſed their authority; for if we make a wrong judgment of things, and upon that account deny our obedience to the laws, where we ſhould have given it; though we ought not to act againſt our conſcience, as I ſaid (nay, it would be a great ſin in us if we ſhould), yet, on the other ſide, we are not to be excuſed for diſobeying the commands of authority, where we might lawfully have obeyed them; unleſs it ſhould prove, that it was thro' no fault of ours that our judgments were miſinformed.

And thus much concerning my firſt head, that of *obedience to laws:* I now come to the other, that of *ſubjection*; as that word implies patient ſubmiſſion to our governors, where we cannot actively comply with what they require of us.

And this is that doctrine of paſſive obedience which of late hath had ſo ill a ſound among many of us: but I dare ſay, for no other reaſon, but becauſe it may have been by ſome miſrepreſented: for where-

wherever it is rightly underſtood, it can give offence to none, but to ſuch as are really diſaffected to the government, and do deſire alterations.

That there is ſuch a ſubmiſſion due from all ſubjects to the ſupreme authority of the place where they live, as ſhall tie up their hands from oppoſing or reſiſting it by force, is evident from the very nature and ends of political ſociety. And I dare ſay, there is not that country upon earth, let the form of their government be what it will (abſolute monarchy, legal monarchy, ariſtocracy, or commonwealth) where this is not a part of the conſtitution. Subjects muſt obey paſſively, where they cannot obey actively; otherwiſe the government would be precarious, and the publick peace at the mercy of every malecontent; and a door would be ſet open to all the inſurrections, rebellions, and treaſons in the world.

Nor is this only a ſtate doctrine, but the doctrine alſo of Jeſus Chriſt, and that a neceſſary, indiſpenſable one too; as ſufficiently appears from thoſe famous words of St. Paul, Rom. xiii. 1, 2. which are ſo plain, that they need no comment: *Let every ſoul* (ſaith he) *be ſubject to the higher powers, for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be, are ordained of God. Whoſoever therefore reſiſteth the power reſiſteth the ordinance of God; and they that reſiſt, ſhall receive to themſelves damnation.* So that, ſo long as this text ſtands in our bibles, the doctrine of non-reſiſtance, or paſſive obedience, muſt be of obligation to all chriſtians.

But then, after I have ſaid this, care muſt be taken that this general doctrine be not miſapplied in particular countries. Though non-reſiſtance or paſſive

paſſive obedience be a duty to all ſubjects, and under all governments, yet it is not expreſſed the ſame way in all places; but both the objects, and the inſtances of it do vary in different nations, according to the different models of their government.

To ſpeak this as plainly as I can. As the laws of the land are the meaſures of our active obedience, ſo are alſo the ſame laws the meaſure of our ſubmiſſion. And as we are not bound to obey, but where the laws and conſtitution require our obedience; ſo neither are we bound to ſubmit, but as the laws and conſtitution do require our ſubmiſſion.

Taking now this to be the true ſtating of the doctrine of paſſive obedience, as I verily believe it is, I do not ſee what colour of reaſon can be offered againſt it. Sure I am, the common pretence, that it tends to introduce tyranny, and arbitrary government, and to make people ſlaves, is quite out of doors: for you ſee, it makes no princes abſolute, where, by the conſtitution, they were not ſo before. Nor doth it deſtroy any liberty of the ſubjects, that they were before in poſſeſſion of. All that it doth, is to preſerve and ſecure the national ſettlement in the ſame poſture, and upon the ſame foot, in and upon which it is already eſtabliſhed. And this is ſo true, that there is not a commonwealth in the world ſo free, but that theſe doctrines of non-reſiſtance and paſſive obedience muſt for ever be taught there, as neceſſary even for the preſervation of their liberties.

As for what this doctrine imports among us, and in our conſtitution, or how far it is to be extended

or limited, it belongs not to me to determine: but thus much the occaſion of this day's meeting will not only warrant me, but oblige me to ſay upon this head, and it is all the application I ſhall now make; namely,

That, by all the laws of this land, the perſon of the king is ſacred and inviolable; and, that to attempt his life in any way, or upon any pretence, always was and is high-treaſon. And if ſo, what are we to think of that fact, which was on this day committed upon the perſon of our late ſovereign, of bleſſed memory, king Charles I. taking it with all its circumſtances? Why certainly, how ſlight ſoever ſome people among us may make of it, it was a moſt barbarous murder; a violation of the laws of God and man, a ſcandal to the proteſtant religion, and a reproach to the people of England; whilſt the impious rage of a few, ſtands imputed by our adverſaries to the whole nation. All this I may ſay of this fact; for it is no more than is ſaid of it by the lords and commons of England in that act of parliament, which appoints the keeping of this day as a perpetual faſt.

I am ſenſible how uneaſy ſome are at the mentioning of this; and how gladly they would have both the thing, and the memorial of it, forgot among us. I muſt confeſs, I could wiſh ſo too, provided we were ſure that God had forgot it; ſo, I mean, forgot it, as that we were no longer obnoxious to his judgments, upon the account of that innocent blood: and provided likewiſe, in the ſecond place, that thoſe factious, republican principles, which have once overturned our government, and brought an

excellent prince to an unhappy end, were so far forgot among us, as that there was no danger from them of ever having this or the like tragedy acted again in our nation. But so long as we have apprehensions from either of these things, so long it will be fit for us to remember this fact, and this day; and both to implore the mercy of God, that neither the guilt of that sacred and innocent blood, nor those other sins, by which God was provoked to deliver up both us and our king into the hands of cruel and unreasonable men, may at any time hereafter be visited upon us, or our posterity: and likewise to suffer ourselves to be put in mind of that duty, which by St. Paul's authority, I have been all this while insisting on, namely, *to be subject to principalities and powers*, and *to obey magistrates*: or, if you will rather take it in the words of Solomon, Prov. xxiv. 21. *To fear the Lord and the king, and not to meddle with them that are given to change.*

# SERMON III.

## The reaſonableneſs of Believing without Seeing.

St. JOHN XX. 29.

—— *Bleſſed are they that have not ſeen, and yet have believed.*

THESE are our Saviour's words to St. Thomas after his reſurrection. The occaſion of them was this: the other diſciples had aſſured Thomas, that our Saviour was riſen from the dead, and that he had in perſon appeared to them. Thomas would not believe this upon their report, but required farther evidence. *Except*, (ſaith he) *I ſhall ſee in his hands the prints of the nails, and thruſt my hand into his ſide, I will not believe.* The next time that our Saviour appeared to them, Thomas was in the company, and then he was pleaſed to give him ſuch a proof of his reſurrection as he himſelf had ſtood upon: for he calls upon him, and bids him *reach forth his finger, and behold his hands*, where the print of the

the nails was, *and reach forth his hand, and thrust it into his side*, and after this, *not to be faithless, but believing*. Hereupon Thomas owns himself fully convinced, and, in token thereof, *he answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.* Then come in the words of the text: *Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*

In which words, as our Saviour tacitly reproves Thomas for his incredulity, in not believing a matter of fact well attested, unless he himself saw it; so he lays down an universal proposition for the encouragement of all mankind in future ages of the world, to believe in him, though they had not seen him.

Our Saviour knew very well, that this was to be the case of far the greatest part that were to believe in him. For it was only to the men of that age in which he lived, and of that country where he conversed, to whom it was given to hear from his own mouth his divine doctrines, and to see with their eyes the proofs that he gave of his divine mission, particularly that illustrious one of his resurrection from the dead. But for all the succeeding generations of men, they were to believe without seeing. Their faith was not to be grounded on the evidence of their own senses, but on the testimony of those that had had that evidence. And therefore, for the obliging and encouraging all mankind, in the ages to come, to embrace his religion upon such motives and such evidence as this, he pronounceth these words; *Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*

I doubt not but that all christians are fully satisfied both of the truth and reason of this proposition of our Saviour, and are convinced that they have motives enough to oblige them to believe in him, and to own his religion; tho' they never saw, nor were capable of seeing the original proofs and evidence he gave for the truth of it. Indeed, if it were otherwise, none of us at this day could be christians upon rational grounds. But this doctrine will not pass among all men. On the contrary, by several, their not seeing, is made the great, if not the only pretence, for their not believing. This being so, I hope it will not be time mispent, if I endeavour to answer this plea of theirs; and I think, I cannot to better purpose discourse upon this text, than by doing so.

The case is this. Some there are among us that endeavour to run down all revealed religion. If you ask them, whether then they are for any religion at all? They will tell you, yes; they are for that which natural reason teacheth. We wish they were in good earnest when they say this: for then we should hope to be soon all of a mind. For we cannot doubt but that whosoever doth sincerely believe all that natural reason will teach him about religion, and doth seriously endeavour to frame his life accordingly; such a one will not fail to embrace christianity, whenever the doctrines of our Saviour, and the proofs he gave for the truth of them, are fairly represented to him. But, in truth, these mens loose way, both of discoursing and of living, renders it suspicious, that their profession of natural religion is not very sincere; but only for the shel-

tring

tring them from the imputation of atheiſm, and ſerving other ſecular ends. For ſuch a ſcheme of natural religion have they framed to themſelves, as will not much trouble their conſciences, let them live how they will. But now the chriſtian religion (which is that they chiefly oppoſe under the name of revealed religion) is a more ſtubborn thing, and will not ſo eaſily be brought to comply with their humours and inclinations. And that we fear, though they are loth to own it, is the ſecret reaſon of their grudge againſt it. The goſpel of Chriſt doth not favour ſuch ſort of principles as theſe men have taken up, nor ſuch a kind of life as they are engaged in; but, on the contrary, ſeverely declares againſt them. And therefore ſome colourable reaſons muſt be found out, for the ſetting aſide the authority of this goſpel, which is ſo contradictory to their intereſts. But how is this to be come by?

To object againſt the ſufficiency of the proof that our Saviour gave to the world of his being ſent from God to teach this religion to mankind, that there is no colour for: for they are ſenſible, that if his hiſtory, as it is related in the goſpel, be admitted to be a true hiſtory, ſo that one may depend upon the matters of fact there recorded concerning him: if this, I ſay, be admitted, it cannot be denied, but that our Saviour gave abundant evidence, that he was what he pretended to be, the Son of God, and the great prophet whom all men were to be obedient to, if they meant to be ſaved.

Since therefore they cannot faſten upon this, they pitch upon another method. They endeavour to run down all our evidence for the truth of Chriſt's

religion, by making a difference between seeing our Saviour's miracles, and reading them in a book. They will allow, that if any man heard or saw Jesus Christ speaking those things, or doing those things which are recorded of him; such a man would have sufficient reason to induce him to be his disciple: but they deny that they have any such reason to be so, because they neither heard nor saw any of those things; nor are they convinced that such things were ever done. They reproach us, that when they desire of us a proof of the christian religion, all the answer they can obtain of us is, that they must go to such a book (which we call the bible) and that will satisfy them. But why should they pin their faith upon any book in the world? This is what they urge for their infidelity.

This now being the state of the controversy between us and several of the unbelievers among us, you see it turns upon this single point that is now before us; namely, whether a man that does not see, may not have sufficient reason to believe at many hundred years distance? Or more particularly thus; whether we in these days, who never saw our Saviour, nor his miracles (particularly that of his resurrection, with reference to which these words were spoken) have not abundant reason to believe in him, upon the testimony of those that did see all these things? We say, we have. They say, we have not. Here therefore we join issue.

Now for the making good our side of the question, I proceed by these steps:

In the first place, we lay it down as a principle, and, I suppose, every body will agree to it, that if Jesus

Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles, when they firſt preached the goſpel, did give ſufficient proof and evidence that what they preached was from God; and likewiſe, if both the doctrine they preached, and the proof and evidence they gave for it, be faithfully tranſmitted to us; and with ſuch certainty likewiſe, that we cannot have any reaſonable doubt that it is ſo tranſmitted: then, I ſay, we can have no reaſon in the earth to complain, that we want evidence for the truth of the goſpel. I do not ſay yet, that we have as ſtrong proof, as if we had ſeen or heard thoſe things ourſelves: but, I ſay, we have ſufficient proof to convince any reaſonable unbiaſſed man: this, I preſume, no body will deny, and it is all that we aſk at preſent.

In the ſecond place, I believe none will deny, that what was once really ſpoken, or what was once really done, may be truly and faithfully put into writing. And it is poſſible, likewiſe, that thoſe writings may come ſo well atteſted, to them that live many ages after thoſe things were ſpoken, or done, that none in any age can reaſonably doubt that they give a true and faithful account of the things therein reported to be done or taught. I ſay, I believe, none will deny this; for if it be not admitted, we can give no credit to any hiſtory that was written; nor, conſequently, to any matter of fact that was done, in former ages. It therefore will, I hope, be granted, that both the doctrines of our Saviour, and his proofs of them, might, in this way, if God ſo pleaſed, be ſo faithfully tranſmitted to poſterity, that future ages might certainly come to the knowledge of them.

In the third place we say, that it is obvious to all mankind, that if ever there was any affair in the world, wherein the providence of God was concerned, that there should be a faithful conveyance of it made to all generations to come; and carrying the marks of its own credibility, this affair of the gospel of Christ was such a one; because the importance of it to all the children of men was such, that their salvation or damnation, to the end of the world, did depend upon the belief of it, if the author of this gospel delivered a true doctrine. And therefore we may certainly conclude, that if what Christ taught at the first, was from God; God would take care that what he taught, together with sufficient proof of the truth of it, should be conveyed to all the ages of the world. And if this was to be contained in a book, we may likewise be assured, that book should come to us, with such evidence of its being true, that we could have no reasonable suspicion concerning it. We are sure God's providence hath taken care that writings of an ancienter date than the gospel, that are of infinitely less consequence to mankind, should come down to us without any suspicion of imposture: and can it be imagined then, his providence should be unconcerned, in preserving and bringing safe to our hands, the records of a thing, by the belief or denial of which, the eternal state of men in the other world is to be concluded?

In the fourth place, having laid these foundations, we advance a step higher. It is certain, that there was a timely and a faithful record of all things that Jesus Christ taught in order to salvation, and of all the proofs he gave for the truth and divinity of his doctrine:

trine: and this record is contained in the books of the New-teſtament.

That this is true matter of fact, we have all the proof that a thing of this nature is capable of. Theſe books were written, either by men that were eye and ear witneſſes of our Saviour's miracles, and doctrine, and converſation; or by ſuch as converſed with thoſe that were. This appears not only from the writings themſelves, which carry in them all the marks of their being written by perſons ſo qualified; but alſo from the conſtant tradition that hath in all ages gone in the world, about the authors of theſe writings. And you may with as much, or more reaſon doubt, that thoſe writings among us, which go under the name of Cicero, or Cæſar, or Seneca, or any other moſt unqueſtioned author, were none of theirs, but forged ſince their times, than you can doubt that the goſpels of St. Matthew, Mark, and John, and Luke's both goſpel and acts of the apoſtles, and St. Paul's epiſtles, were not written by thoſe authors, or in the age they pretend to be. I ſay, there is a great deal more reaſon to doubt of that, than there is of this: becauſe we have not only all the proofs of the genuineneſs of thoſe writings, that can be given for any other writings, which are the moſt unqueſtioned in the world; but this over and above, which is compatible to none but theſe; namely, that the matter of theſe writings is of ſuch a nature, that all mankind were concerned to detect the fraud and the forgery of them, if there had been any: but yet they have always paſſed under the names they bear at this day; nay, and in every age, from the firſt publiſhing of them, we have authentick authorities, in a continued ſucceſſion to vouch for them.

Well,

Well, but supposing these men to be the authors of these writings; yet how can we depend upon the truth of what they have reported?

In answer to this, I say, in the fifth place, let any man read them, and then speak from his conscience, whether he does not think that these men were in good earnest, and did really write according to their own inward sense? And yet the matters they wrote were such, as it was not possible they could be deceived about them, because they were all plain matters of fact; things which their eyes and ears were witnesses of. But that is not all: they who lived in those days, and had full opportunities of examining the truth of what they had written, gave testimony to them; since they built their faith upon the matters of fact they had delivered. If therefore you suppose these writers to be sincere honest men, it is certain that what they recorded concerning our Lord Jesus, and his doctrines, and his actions, must be true. On the other side, if you suppose them to have had designs of imposing upon the world with a false story, you must, at the same time, suppose a great number of people (of whom there is no ground for such a suspicion) to be perfect fools or madmen, who gave so much credit to all that matter which they related concerning our Saviour, that they laid down their lives to attest the truth of it.

I know nothing to be said against this, unless it be, that though they could not well be supposed to be mistaken in the matters of fact which they relate concerning our Saviour, yet they might in the matter of his doctrines. These they might misrepresent, and consequently their writings ought not to be of that

that authority with us, as that we ſhould be bound to believe all that they ſay. But to this I give a very ſhort anſwer; if we do admit them to be true reporters of matters of fact, we muſt alſo of neceſſity admit them to be true reporters, nay, I ſay more, infallible reporters of our Saviour's doctrine; ſo as that their declarations of it muſt for ever conclude all chriſtians. And the reaſon is this: the authors of theſe writings were either apoſtles, or apoſtolick men, as has been ſaid before; and it is one of the matters of fact reported in theſe writings, that our Saviour did ſo aſſiſt theſe men with his Holy Spirit, that they were enabled faithfully and infallibly to preach that doctrine to others which he had delivered to them. Now, if we be ſure they were inſpired in what they preached, we may be as much aſſured they were inſpired in putting what they preached into writing, ſince it was the ſame doctrine that they preached and that they wrote; and eſpecially, ſince after it was written it was to remain to all ſucceeding generations, and to be a rule of mens faith ſo long as the world ſhould laſt. And further, we are ſure, that all the chriſtians of thoſe days did look upon thoſe writings to have a ſtamp of divine authority upon them, and diſtinguiſhed them from all other human compoſitions. And to evidence this, they made theſe writings to be the ſtandard of their belief; the meaſure by which they tried all opinions and doctrines in religion: ſo that whatever was not found in theſe ſcriptures, was not accounted as neceſſary to ſalvation; and whatever was found diſagreeeing from theſe ſcriptures, was rejected as an innovation, or an error in chriſtianity: and of this we have ſufficient evidence from antiquity.

Well,

Well, but how shall we know whether these scriptures be faithfully transmitted down to us? How do we know but that they may have been corrupted since the time they were written, and made to speak different things now, from what they did at the first? This is the last question upon this argument; and in answer to it I say, in the sixth place,

If the providence of God, as I told you before, was ever concerned to preserve any writings from being depraved or corrupted, it was certainly more especially concerned to do it, as to the writings we are now speaking of, they being of such vast importance to all the generations of mankind. But I do not leave the matter so: there is evidence of fact, as well as reason, to be offered in this case.

Let the books of the New-testament, as we now have them, be tried by the severest rules of criticism: let the copies both ancient and modern, which are extant of them, be compared: let the several versions of them likewise, that were made in the earliest times, be examined: lastly, let all the ecclesiastical writers, from the beginning of christianity to this day, who have either commented upon them, or proved any doctrine from them, or but occasionally quoted them in their writings, be searched into, it will appear, by all these ways of trial, that our scriptures are the same at this day, that they were at the beginning, without any material difference.

Indeed, considering the multitude of copies that were taken of these books, and the several translations that were made of them into other languages, even shortly after the time they were first published; we

we cannot imagine it poſſible, that, in after-ages, any thing could be foiſted into them, to ſerve the turn of any party, but the impoſture would have been preſently diſcovered. And accordingly we find, that when any attempts of this kind have been made, there were not wanting thoſe who took care to detect and expoſe them.

I do not, when I ſay this, deny that there are many differences and various readings to be met with, in the ancient copies of theſe books, occaſioned by the negligence or miſtakes of tranſcribers: nay, and ſome few paſſages may be wanting, in ſome copies, that are found in others. But then I deſire it may be obſerved, that theſe differences are of ſuch ſmall moment, that it is of no importance to the chriſtian faith, which of the readings be right, and which of them be wrong; for they all agree in all the matters which concern either our Saviour's doctrines, or his precepts, or the proofs he gave of his divine miſſion: and farther agreement than this, I think, none needs to deſire.

Indeed, if ſlight and verbal differences, in copies, be a good argument againſt the genuineneſs of a writing, we have no genuine writing of any ancient author at this day; for the ſame thing has happened to all old books whatſoever, that have been often tranſcribed: and to ſuppoſe that it ſhould be otherwiſe, in the books of the ſcripture, is to ſuppoſe, that God ought in every age, as immediately and infallibly to guide the pen of every tranſcriber of them, as he did the minds of their firſt authors.

To make now a little reflection on what I have ſaid about the ſcriptures of the New-teſtament. It

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is urged by our deists, as a very hard thing, that whereas, when the gospel was first preached, men had opportunities of being convinced by their senses of the truth of it; (or, at least, it is pretended they had such opportunities) we now are only referred to a book that gives us an account of these matters: why, I desire to know, what other way they would have had an account of them but by books? Would they have had our Saviour to come down from heaven every fifty or threescore years, and to preach the same doctrine, and confirm it by the same miracles, to the men of that generation, that he once did among the Jews? Yet this must be supposed necessary for him to do, if men cannot otherwise be convinced of the truth of his religion, but by their senses: nay, that would not be enough, he must not only publish his doctrine, and repeat his miracles to every age, but to every individual man of every age; otherwise all men had not opportunity of being convinced by their senses, and consequently, could not, upon reasonable grounds, believe in him. But if this supposition be absurd, as it certainly is, then we must be content (and there is all the reason in the world we should be so) with that sort of evidence for the truth of his gospel, that other matters of fact, done at a great distance of time from us, are capable of: that is to say, authentic witnesses of them at the first; and the testimony of those witnesses faithfully transmitted down to posterity. And how any testimony can be more faithfully transmitted than by the way of writing, let them shew us if they can.

And

And then, as for the books or writings that we refer you to in this caſe, we aſk no more for the gaining credit to them, than only, that it may be ſeriouſly conſidered, of what ſort they are, and what authority they carry along with them.

We do not ſend you to Herodotus, and Pliny, or ſuch like writers, who, though they were very good authors, yet took a great deal of what they ſaid from uncertain reports.

Much leſs do we ſend you to a golden legend, or the lives of the ſaints, as they have been written of later days by men, who took advantage of the ignorance and credulity of the age they lived in, to obtrude what they pleaſed upon the world.

But we ſend you to authors, who themſelves knew, and were witneſſes of what they wrote.

Who gave all poſſible proof of their ſincerity and integrity, not only by publicly, in all places, aſſerting the truth of what they had written, but ſome of them alſo ſealing it with their blood.

Who were ſo aſſiſted with the Divine Spirit, that they themſelves wrought the ſame miracles, for the confirmation of Chriſt's doctrine, that they had recorded him to have done.

And laſtly, who in all ſucceeding ages were had in ſuch veneration among chriſtians, that their writings were eſteemed the platform and ſtandard of true faith; and upon which they ſet ſo high a value, that they would keep them at the peril of their lives. And inſtances we have of multitudes, who rather choſe torments and death, than they would deliver up their bibles.

Taking

Taking now all this together, can any thing like it be said for the truth or the authority of any other book in the world?

But this is not all. I desire, in the seventh and last place, it may be considered, That we do not send you to a bare book for the proof of the christian religion, how much soever that book may have the marks, not only of a true and genuine, but also of a divine history: but we insist upon a great many other things for the proof of the matters contained in that book, besides the authority of the book itself.

If, indeed, nothing had followed upon Christ's publishing his gospel, and we had never heard more of it, or him, save what we might happen to meet with in those old writings; I do not know how far their evidence alone, now, at the distance of near seventeen hundred years, would have prevailed with us to embrace his religion: but now, when we see and are convinced, that so many remarkable effects ensued upon his preaching in the world, and still continue visible at this day; which yet cannot be ascribed to any other cause, than to the particular power and providence of God, which was concerned to justify our Saviour, and his pretensions to the world: this is certainly a new evidence, and a standing one, both for that book which mentions all these things, and, especially, for that cause it maintains.

The case of the christian religion is plainly this:

Jesus Christ, a mean person as to his outward circumstances, sets up for a preacher of a new religion, and this, not in the times of ignorance and barbarism (when an imposture might be supposed more easy to be carried on, and which advantages Maho-

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met afterwards made uſe of) but in the reign of Auguſtus Cæſar, when learning, and arts, and ſciences were in the moſt flouriſhing condition that ever they were known to be.

He chuſes a company of very ordinary unlettered men, but very honeſt men, to be the witneſſes of his converſation and doctrine; and theſe he deſigns for the ſpreaders of his religion throughout the world.

He neither makes uſe of arts nor arms for the gaining diſciples to himſelf; only declares plainly, that he is the perſon, whom God had long before promiſed to ſend, and whom he did now ſend, to publiſh eternal ſalvation to all that ſhould believe in him.

The religion which he taught, and which all his followers were to take upon them, was ſo far from gratifying fleſh and blood, that it ſeemed much better contrived, as the world then ſtood, for the frightening men from it, than for the alluring proſelytes to it.

For there was nothing in it that miniſtred to any ſenſual or worldly purpoſes; nothing that tended to make a man either wiſe, or rich, or great, or happy, in the ſenſe of this world, but all the quite contrary: he that would be his diſciple, muſt quit all the popular notions about happineſs: inſtead of being thought wiſe, muſt ſubmit to be counted a fool for Chriſt's ſake: inſtead of getting wealth, or honour, or preferment, muſt be prepared to part with all theſe things, if he was already poſſeſſed of them; muſt deny himſelf, and all his temporal intereſts; nay, muſt forſake father and mother, and his own life alſo, whenever he was called to it. The way to heaven,

heaven, as he taught it, was by humility and meekness, and contempt of the world, and all the glories of it; by patient suffering afflictions and injuries, and an absolute resignation of ourselves to God, to do and suffer whatever was his will. And he himself, as he lived thus, so did he thus go off the stage; being, after three years preaching this sort of doctrine, hanged up on a cross, as an impostor, and that by the vote of his own countrymen.

Where now was the temptation to the generality of men, to own this man as a prophet sent from God to mankind? Why, in truth, by what I have yet represented, there was very little: nay, indeed, to any one that considers these beginnings of the gospel, it will be matter of astonishment that any more came of it, and that it did not presently die with the author of it.

But here was the thing: our Lord, in how poor a condition soever he lived, yet he *spake as never man spake*. He so explained the old scriptures, which foretold of him; he taught such important truths concerning another life, concerning the nature and providence of God, and his mercy to lost mankind, and the way in which he would be served, and in what sort of things it was that true religion did consist, that he pierced the very souls of those that heard him. There was so much evidence in the truths themselves that he delivered, that no honest, virtuously disposed minds could stand out against them, but must be convinced in their own consciences, that this, of all that they had ever heard of, was a religion worthiest to come from God, and most accommodated to the spiritual needs of men; nay,

and

and their temporal ones too, ſuppoſing that all men would embrace it.

And then the whole tenor of his life was ſuitable hereunto: for he appeared, in all his actions and converſation, to be a man of ſo much candour, and goodneſs, and clearneſs of ſpirit; ſo humble, ſo juſt, ſo prudent, ſo charitable, ſo obliging to all mankind; ſo full of piety, and devotion, and reſignation to God; and, laſtly, ſo free from all ſuſpicion that he carried on any ſelfiſh deſigns, that all theſe heavenly doctrines came better out of his mouth, than if any other had delivered them.

But that which crowned all, was this; that throughout the whole ſtage of his life, there was a viſible evidence of a divine power and preſence going along with him, which ſhewed itſelf in a thouſand inſtances of the moſt glorious miracles that ever were ſeen or heard of in the world, and that to the amazement of the whole country where he lived.

In this manner, I ſay, did our Saviour lay the foundation for a belief of his doctrine, to all ſucceeding generations; and a ſolid, unſhaken foundation it was.

But yet, for all that, if the power of God had ſtopped here, I do not know what ſuperſtructure would ever have been made upon this foundation.

For ſo it was, that thoſe very men, thoſe honeſt plain-hearted men, that he had taken into his family, to be witneſs of what he did and taught, with a deſign, as I told you, of ſending them abroad to publiſh all thoſe things throughout the world; yet, when he came to die, ſuch poor-ſpirit-

ed

ed creatures they proved, that every man of them forſook him.

O ſad example of human frailty and inconſtancy! Thoſe men that had the greateſt opportunities of knowing him, and his doctrine, and had profeſſed the moſt firm reſolutions of adhering to him, yet all forſook him in the hour of danger, and ſhifted for themſelves.

But God Almighty, though he ſuffered good men to act as men, did not therefore lay aſide that great deſign he had ſet on foot by our Lord Jeſus; no, nor of accompliſhing it by the miniſtry of theſe very men.

For he raiſed up his Son from the dead on the third day (as our Saviour had before told them he would) and this put new life and ſpirit into thoſe perſons that had lately abandoned him.

But that was not all: our Saviour calls them all together, after he was thus riſen from the dead: he acquaints them with the work that he had committed to them: he aſſures them, that he will be with them, and thoſe that ſhould ſucceed them in that miniſtry, for ever: not in perſon; for he was to continue in heaven, to intercede for all believers at the right hand of God; but by the virtue and preſence of the Holy Spirit, who was to be his deputy and vicegerent upon earth. This Holy Spirit he would, in a few days, ſend down upon them, who ſhould effectually furniſh and endue them with all powers, and qualities, and abilities needful for the diſcharge of ſo great a work, as the converſion of the world to his religion was. And after he had told them theſe things, he viſibly, in their preſence, aſcended up into heaven.

Here

Here now begins Chriſt's kingdom. He had conquered death before, and now he comes to conquer the devil and the world: from henceforward you hear of no fear, no puſillanimity, no mean behaviour in any of the apoſtles. They then go and preach to all the world that goſpel, which their maſter ordered them. No danger frights them: no human learning or philoſophy is able to ſtand before them. The greateſt obſtacles, the greateſt terrors that come in their way, are ſo far from making them quit the work they had begun, that they rather prove incentives to them to go on in it. They make it their buſineſs to gain ſouls in every place to Jeſus Chriſt: they run about the whole Roman empire, and farther than ever that extended. They pretend to no eloquence, no polite learning, no arts of inſinuation; but they preach a plain, honeſt, pious doctrine; but withal ſuch a doctrine, that, as the times then went, a man muſt expect to bid an everlaſting adieu to all the wealth, and pleaſures, and honours of this world, if he once embraced it. They declare to all people the authority they had for preaching this doctrine: they vouch our Lord Jeſus Chriſt as the author of it, who died for the bearing teſtimony to it, and roſe again for its confirmation, and is now king of heaven and earth. And they ſhewed, that they had an authentic commiſſion from heaven for the doing all this, by ſpeaking the language of every country where they came, without ever being taught it; by curing all diſeaſed people that were brought to them; by diſpoſſeſſing devils; by giving ſight to the blind, and making the lame to walk, and reſtoring dead bodies to life.

All

All these wonderful things they did all the world over. And what the effects hereof were, was manifest every where, and continues manifest to this day.

The gospel spread like lightning in all places; and wherever it came, pagan idolatry was confounded, till at last the whole Roman empire was converted to the religion of Jesus Christ. Converted it was by men naked and unassisted, without the least encouragement at the first from the secular powers; nay, in contradiction to the severest penalties that the secular powers could contrive or decree to hinder it.

We grant, indeed, that many thousands of brave men did lose their lives in this religious war between our Lord Jesus Christ and the devil (who was then the prince of this world) and did patiently submit to death, that they might assert the truth of our Saviour's cause: but that was Christ's way of vanquishing the devil; he did thus *break the serpent's head*, while the serpent *bruised his heel*: and he did at last, by this way, effectually break his kingdom; as is visible and notorious even from that time to this day.

And now I appeal to every one, whether this, which is matter of fact, and known to all men that look into the histories of time; and of which we, at this day, see and enjoy the happy effects, in having the christian religion not only received among us, but made a part of our national constitution: I say, whether this be not a convincing proof, both of the truth of our religion, and likewise of those scriptures from whence we fetch it.

Had

Had not the chriſtian religion been true, how could theſe things have ever come to paſs, ſeeing it is utterly inconceivable that, without a divine power, they could be effected? And ſure none can ſuppoſe that God would exert his power for the confirming of a falſhood.

And again; had not our ſcriptures been true likewiſe, or had they been the fictions of any deſigning men, how is it poſſible they ſhould have given us an account of theſe things ſo long before they came to paſs, and when there was ſo little appearance of their ever coming to paſs? And yet all that I have now mentioned is plainly there ſet down, as foretold by our Saviour and his apoſtles: and not only thoſe things, but a great many other remarkable events are there alſo foretold, which have ſince been exactly made good.

I hope, by what hath been ſaid, it doth appear that we, at this day, have ſufficient arguments to oblige us to believe and adhere to the religion of Jeſus Chriſt, though we never ſaw the original proofs he gave of it; which was the point I was to make good. For, I think I have ſhewed, that if thoſe proofs were good and concluſive at the firſt, to them that ſaw them, and were witneſſes of them; they are ſo to us now, who receive them upon their teſtimony. And as for the difference that may be alledged in point of evidence, between a man's ſeeing a thing, and receiving it upon the report of others; all that, I think, by the account I have given, is in a great meaſure out of doors as to this matter. For the report, upon which we receive the goſpel, being ſo authentic, ſo unexceptionable, and likewiſe ſo confirmed by matters of fact ſtill viſible to us, it amounts to as ſtrong a proof, as if we had evidence of ſenſe. And I do in my conſcience believe,

that there is not a man in this nation now stands out against the religion of Jesus Christ, but who would have done so, if he had lived in the time of our Saviour, and heard him preach the gospel.

As for us who believe, let us persevere in our faith without wavering: our faith is never the worse for not *seeing: Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.* And as for those that do not believe, their not seeing will be no excuse for them, if our Saviour may be credited; for it was as well with respect to them that did not see, as to them that did, that he pronounced his definitive sentence, when he sent out his apostles to preach his religion: *Go* (saith he) *and preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.*

God give us all grace to consider the things that belong to our everlasting peace! That both all those who now oppose the *truth as it is in Christ Jesus*, may be converted from the error of their ways; and that all those who do own and profess it, may adorn the doctrine of God, which he hath called them to, by a pure, holy, and unblameable life; to the glory of God, and the eternal salvation of their souls, in the day of our Lord Jesus. To whom, &c.

SER-

# SERMON IV.

## The obligation of Princes to be Nurſing-fathers to their Subjects.

ISAIAH xlix. 23.

*Kings ſhall be thy nurſing-fathers, and their queens thy nurſing-mothers.*

I AM aware how much time the following ſolemnity will take up, and therefore I mean to give as little interruption to it as poſſible, being very ſenſible that the ſhortneſs of my ſermon will be the beſt recommendation of it. Three things I beg leave to do upon this occaſion:

Firſt, To give ſome account of the promiſe here made in my text; and what obligation it lays upon princes, with relation to their ſubjects.

Secondly, To congratulate with you and the whole kingdom, the happy proſpect we have of God's making good this promiſe to us at this day, in ſettling her preſent majeſty upon the throne of her anceſtors.

Thirdly, To ſhew what returns of duty, and gratitude, and filial obedience, this conſideration of the queen's being a nurſing-mother to her people, doth call for from us, and all other her ſubjects.

I begin with the firſt.

This chapter, out of which I have taken my text, hath always been underſtood to be, and it certainly is, a prophecy of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and of the propagation of his religion, and the ſpreading of his church throughout the world: and it teacheth us, that though the beginnings of this religion, this church of Chriſt, were very ſmall and inconſiderable; yet in due time a vaſt number of nations and people ſhould be brought in to it: ſo that kings and queens ſhould ſubmit their ſcepters to that of Jeſus Chriſt, and become nurſing-fathers and nurſing-mothers to his church and people.

As for the fulfilling of this promiſe, eſpecially among us of this nation, I ſhall ſay ſomething by and by. That which I now deſire to take notice of, is the terms by which the relation between chriſtian princes and their people, is here expreſſed; nurſing-fathers and nurſing-mothers.

Let us take theſe terms in what ſenſe we will; whether for natural parents, or for thoſe that ſupply the place of parents in the taking care of children; that is to ſay, guardians or nurſes; yet the relation in both theſe notions doth imply a wonderful truſt repoſed in princes; and a wonderful care, and ſolicitude, and tenderneſs required of them on the behalf of their ſubjects.

*Kings ſhall be thy nurſing-fathers, and queens thy nurſing-mothers.* O! if all chriſtian princes conſidered this, and looked upon themſelves as placed by God

on their thrones, for the making good this office and character; with what a zeal would it inſpire them for their peoples good?

They would then look upon the whole kingdom as their own family, and concern themſelves as much for the welfare of their ſubjects, as parents do for their children, or guardians for their pupils.

It would be impoſſible, upon this ſuppoſition, that ever they ſhould make their own intereſts diſtinct or ſeparate from thoſe of their people. How great ſoever their powers or prerogatives were, yet they would never think them well employed, but when the public good was promoted by them. Nor could they propoſe any other end to themſelves in their government, but to defend thoſe under their charge, from all inſults from abroad; and to maintain them in peace at home, and to make every ſoul of them as happy as their condition will bear.

And for the doing of this, they would think themſelves obliged, above all things, to take care of the church of God; remembring, that it is chiefly with reſpect to that, that they have the charge of being nurſing-fathers and nurſing-mothers. As ſuch therefore, they would make it their buſineſs to maintain and defend the true religion, to encourage piety and virtue, to oppoſe and diſcountenance all atheiſm and infidelity, all hereſies and ſchiſms, and all vice, and wickedneſs, and impiety, of what nature ſoever. They would uſe their utmoſt endeavour to make all their ſubjects good men, and good chriſtians, as knowing that it is impoſſible for them to be happy, even in this world, without being ſo.

And in order to this, they would be ſure, in their own perſons, to ſet good examples to their ſubjects, of piety and devotion, of temperance and moderation, and

all other virtues. And they would likewiſe take care, as much as in them lay, that all that are about them did the like.

They would be continually thinking of that pſalm of David, which he compoſed upon his being advanced to the kingdom of Iſrael, and wherein he declares the rules he reſolved to obſerve in his government. It is the hundred and firſt pſalm. *I will ſing*, ſaith he, *of mercy and judgment; unto thee, O Lord, will I ſing. O let me have underſtanding in the way of godlineſs. When wilt thou come unto me? I will walk in my houſe with a perfect heart. I will take no wicked thing in hand; I hate the works of the unfaithful, no ſuch ſhall cleave unto me. A froward heart ſhall depart from me; I will not know a wicked perſon.—— My eyes look upon ſuch as are faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me. Whoſo leadeth a godly life, he ſhall be my ſervant.——I ſhall ſoon deſtroy all the ungodly that are in the land, that I may root out all wicked doers from the city of the Lord.*

And as ſuch nurſing-fathers and nurſing-mothers as we are ſpeaking of, would thus concern themſelves for God and his religion, and the ſpiritual intereſts of their people; ſo no leſs ſolicitous would they be to ſecure and promote their temporal peace and happineſs: and accordingly they would think themſelves obliged, as much as they could, to look into the affairs of the kingdom with their own eyes; and to ſee that all the magiſtrates under them did their duty in their reſpective ſtations and offices. They would take care not to ſuffer their favourites to encroach upon them, nor ever to make uſe of their credit with the prince for the oppreſſing the meaneſt of the people. But they would provide, that impartial juſtice ſhould be adminiſtered

to

to all their ſubjects; but yet ſuch juſtice as is tempered with mercy: remembering what God hath told them in the ſcriptures, that *their thrones ſhould be upholden by mercy* [a].

In a word, as the ends they propoſed to themſelves in their government would be the good of their people; ſo the meaſures they pitched upon for the adminiſtration of it would be accordingly: that is to ſay, in ſuch a conſtitution as ours, where the people have their fixed rights, and liberties, and properties, the ſtanding laws of the kingdom would always be the rule of their actions: nor would they either violate thoſe laws themſelves, or give any diſpenſation, or even encouragement, to others to do it.

O how happy is that people that have ſuch princes to reign over them! They are out of all fears of deſpotic or arbitrary proceedings. Indeed, arbitrarineſs is a word fit for none but God; for all his creatures are under laws, by which they muſt be governed: and yet I think it is an affront to God to ſay, that even he himſelf ever acts arbitrarily, in the ſenſe we commonly uſe that word.

God doth, indeed, *whatſoever pleaſeth him, both in heaven and in earth* [b]. But then that pleaſure of his is always governed by the eternal laws of wiſdom, and righteouſneſs, and goodneſs, which are eſſential to his own mind.

We may likewiſe truly ſay, that God doth all things, both in heaven and in earth, for his own glory; but then that glory doth only conſiſt in the manifeſtation of his excellencies and perfections to his creatures, and doing them the greateſt good they are capable of.



[a] Prov. xx. 28. [b] Pſ. cxxxv. 6.

Now such a glory as this, it is allowable to every man in his sphere, to be ambitious of; but princes ought to be so above all others: for by this, they truly imitate God, and make good their character of being his representatives upon earth; a sort of gods among men, as the scripture often calls them. And by governing after this way, they render themselves truly glorious, in being esteemed, and loved, and honoured while they live, and transmitting their memories, with a grateful odour, to all succeeding generations.

But for the most absolute princes upon earth to use their power for the oppressing, or doing hurt to the meanest of mankind; or to think of advancing their glory by any other methods, than by doing all the good they can to all the world, and especially to their own subjects; this is being arbitrary in a wicked sense, and gives such a notion of glory, as was not known among the creatures of God, till the revolt of the fallen angels, from whom some of the corrupted mass of mankind, by their instigation, have since taken it.

But I proceed to my second point; to speak something of the fulfilling of this prophecy in my text, of *God's raising up kings and queens to be our nursing-fathers and nursing-mothers.*

And, blessed be God, this promise hath, for many ages, from time to time, been made good to abundance of nations and people: but to none more amply, more signally, than to us of this kingdom.

As the christian faith was planted here as early, almost, as in any nation, (for it was planted here in the time of the apostles, and probably by one of them) so, if we may believe our histories, it was this country of ours, to which God vouchsafed the honour of having the

the firſt chriſtian king [a] in Europe, and conſequently the firſt nurſing-father: and likewiſe the honour of giving birth to that emperor [d], who was the firſt nurſing-father to all chriſtendom; ſo early was this promiſe of God to his church fulfilled among us.

It is not likewiſe a little to the honour of our nation, nor a little argument of God's care over us, that when the liberties of all chriſtian kings and people were invaded and oppreſſed by the papal uſurpations; and chriſtianity itſelf was corrupted by ſuperſtition and idolatry: it was an Engliſh king that firſt threw off the foreign yoke; and it was an Engliſh king alſo, that firſt begun the reformation of religion.

But the honour of perfecting that great work, was reſerved for a queen. You all know whom I mean, the immortal Elizabeth, whoſe name will be precious, not only in this nation, but in all the reformed countries of Europe, as long as time ſhall laſt.

Her reign alone will let us ſee, that it was not without great reaſon, that, in my text, queens are joined as equal ſharers with kings, in making up the bleſſing which is here promiſed to God's people.

And ſuch another queen, we truſt, God has now given us.

We ought, indeed, to admire God's goodneſs to us: often have we provoked him by our manifold ſins and impieties. And often hath he puniſhed us for them: but yet in his judgments he hath always remembered mercy: when we have been in our greateſt diſtreſſes, he hath always raiſed up deliverers to us.

Even then, when our conſtitution was not long ſince (not ſo long ſince, but that many here preſent may remember it) quite ſubverted by factions at home; yet in



[c] King Lucius. [d] Conſtantine.

a little time did he reſtore our lawful king, and with him our church, and laws, and liberties.

And when, upon his death, all of them were again in danger by a faction from another quarter; and we had no proſpect but of ſinking under the calamity; yet then he raiſed up our late king and queen, of glorious memory, to reſcue us from our dangers, and to ſecure us in the poſſeſſion of all that was dear and valuable to us.

So that, bleſſed be God! we ſtill continue upon the ſame bottom we were: we have ſtill the ſame religion, the ſame church, the ſame government: we ſtill enjoy the ſame rights and liberties, and properties that ever we did. O may they for ever be continued to us and our poſterity! and we hope in God's mercy that they will.

For tho' it hath pleaſed him to deprive us of theſe two great bleſſings, by taking to himſelf, firſt our incomparable queen, and now lately our king, who was the great ſupport, not only of theſe kingdoms, but of all Europe: yet ſuch is his goodneſs, that he hath preſerved to us another branch of the ſame royal ſtock, to repair our loſſes. *Ramo uno avulſo non deficit alter aureus.*

A ſiſter of our never-to-be-forgotten queen is yet left us. Of whom, if we may make preſages, either from the long experience we have had of her many perſonal virtues, expreſſed in a more private condition, and particularly her firmneſs to the Engliſh church, and Engliſh intereſt, in the moſt difficult times:

Or from the inſtances ſhe has already given, ſince her acceſſion to the throne:

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Of her zeal for the ſupporting of the common cauſe of Europe, againſt the exorbitant power of France:

Of her tender love to her people, expreſſed in ſuch a donative, as is hardly to be parallel'd by any thing heretofore ſeen in this kingdom.

Of her concern for our religion, our laws, our liberties; for the continuance of the crown in the proteſtant line; for the government in church and ſtate, as by law eſtabliſhed: all which ſhe has aſſured us in her gracious declaration, and from the throne, "are as dear "to her, as any perſon whatſoever; and that no pains "or diligence ſhall ever be wanting on her part, to "preſerve and maintain them.

Laſtly, Of her ſolemn reſolution, (declared in her proclamation) "to diſcountenance and puniſh all man-"ner of vice, and profaneneſs and immorality in all "perſons, of whatſoever degree or quality; and par-"ticularly, in ſuch as are employed near her royal per-"ſon. And that, for the greater encouragement of "religion and morality, ſhe will, upon all occaſions, "diſtinguiſh perſons of piety and virtue by marks of "her royal favour."

I ſay, if we may draw good omens from thoſe former experiences of her majeſty's life, and from theſe auſpicious beginnings of her reign, there is juſt reaſon for us all to congratulate with the whole kingdom, the happy proſpect we have, that God, in ſetting her upon the throne, hath again fulfilled his promiſe in my text; hath given us, in her, another nurſing-mother to his church and people; and one who will make good that character, in all the inſtances I have before mentioned.

What have we now to do, but to thank God heartily for all the repeated inſtances of his favour to us,

and

and particularly this laſt one. And to pray earneſtly for her majeſty, that her following reign may be ſuitable to theſe happy beginnings.

But in order to theſe prayers being effectual, there is ſomething required of us, which is fit here to be mentioned, as being a natural application of what I have already ſaid.

And that is, That we take care not to hinder or obſtruct the happy effects of her majeſty's gracious intentions to her people, by any unbecoming carriage of ours: but always bear in mind what returns of duty, and gratitude, and filial obedience, this conſideration of the queen's being a nurſing-mother to her people, doth call for from us, and all other her ſubjects.

This is the third, and laſt thing, I propoſed to ſpeak to, but for fear of being too long, I ſhall but juſt touch upon it.

If all ſubjects did ſeriouſly conſider this relation between their princes and them, they would think themſelves obliged to bear the ſame love and affection, to pay the ſame honour, and reverence, and obedience, to their nurſing-fathers and nurſing-mothers, as they do their natural parents.

They would endeavour to make their reigns as eaſy as was poſſible, by contributing, every man in his ſphere, what aſſiſtance they could to their prince, for the promoting the common good.

They would make it their ſtudy to live in as much peace and unity with their fellow-ſubjects, as if they dwelt together in one family.

They would have no intereſts ſeparate from the common-wealth; nor would they, for the advancing themſelves, ever ſeek the ruin of others.

They would not, for difference in opinion about the methods of the publick conduct, break out into parties

parties and factions: much leſs, in caſe of ſuch diviſions, would they ſacrifice the peace of the kingdom to their own private reſentments, and mingle heaven and earth for the ſupporting of a ſide.

They would ſeriouſly remember the caution which St. Paul hath given us, and which indeed concerns every one of this nation, but eſpecially thoſe that are concerned in the public management, often to think of: *If* (ſaith he) *ye bite and devour one another, have a care that ye be not conſumed one of another* [e]. Nothing can ever ſo much endanger this kingdom as our own diviſions. And if ever we be ruined, in all probability, it is theſe will be the cauſe of it.

It is one very good omen (among the reſt that I have mentioned) of her majeſty's happy reign, that no prince ever came to the throne with a more general ſatisfaction, and with more good wiſhes of the people.

And it muſt be ſaid, to the honour of this parliament, that never any parliament gave more extraordinary teſtimonies of their ſincere affection, and duty, and kindneſs to their prince, than this parliament hath given to the queen.

O may this good underſtanding, theſe mutual endearments between the queen and her people, for ever continue! And abhorred be the memory of that man, that makes the firſt ſtep towards the breaking of them.

Then ſhall we be happy: as happy as the viciſſitudes of this world will allow us to be. And as the queen will rejoice in her people; ſo it will be her people's daily prayer, that God would long, long preſerve queen Anne.

[e] Gal. v. 15.

# SERMON V.

## A ſerious exhortation to Repentance and a holy Life.

HEB. ii. 3.

*How ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great ſalvation?*

TO ſhew the meaning of this text, and the uſe we are to put it to, there needs no more to be done, than to enquire what is here meant by ſalvation: and then, ſecondly, upon what occaſion theſe words come in, and what was the apoſtle's deſign in them.

As to the firſt; ſalvation, in its general ſenſe, imports any great deliverance from evil or danger. Thus God's conducting the Iſraelites through the Red-Sea, and drowning the Egyptians, is called God's ſalvation, Exod. xiv. 13. Thus the deliverance of the Iſraelites out of the hands of the Philiſtines, is called *a great ſalvation*, 1 Sam. xiv. 45. And indeed this is the uſual ſenſe of the word throughout the Old-teſtament. But now, becauſe the greateſt of all evils and dangers which mankind are obnoxious to, are thoſe that are occaſioned by their ſins; therefore is the word ſalvation, by way of eminence, appropriated to that deliverance, which

which our Lord Jeſus Jeſus Chriſt wrought for mankind, from their ſins and the puniſhment of them. So that our ſalvation, in the New-teſtament ſenſe, is the ſame thing with our redemption by Chriſt Jeſus. Chriſt came to be our Saviour, and that redemption he wrought for us, is our ſalvation. And as many parts or branches as there go to the making up that redemption; ſo many parts and branches there go to the making up our ſalvation.

This, now, is that ſalvation my text ſpeaks of; only with this difference, that by an uſual figure, the apoſtle here puts ſalvation for the doctrine of ſalvation, or that goſpel of Chriſt which tenders this ſalvation to mankind; as appears by what follows in the verſe; *How ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great ſalvation; which at the firſt began to be ſpoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?* Now what ſalvation could that be which was firſt ſpoken by our Lord, and confirm'd by the apoſtles that heard him, but the doctrine, or the goſpel of this ſalvation which they preached?

As for the other thing; the connection of this text with what goes before, and the deſign that is here purſued, it lies thus: the apoſtle begins this chapter with an exhortation, by way of inference from his former diſcourſe: *We ought therefore* (ſaith he) *to give the more earneſt heed to the things we have heard*, (that is, the doctrine of the goſpel he had been recommending to them) *leſt at any time we let them ſlip.* In the next verſe, he gives a reaſon why they ought to be ſo regardful of theſe things: *Becauſe* (ſays he) *if the word ſpoken by angels was ſtedfaſt, and every tranſgreſſion and diſobedience received a juſt recompence of reward, how ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great ſalvation;*

*which*

*which at the firſt began to be ſpoken by the Lord*, &c. ? That is to ſay; if the old law, the law of Moſes, which was delivered only by angels, was of ſo great authority, that God would not permit any wilful tranſgreſſion of it to go without a ſevere puniſhment: how ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect or deſpiſe the new law of the goſpel; the doctrine of ſo great a ſalvation, as is delivered to us by no leſs a perſon than the Son of God, and confirmed to us by his apoſtles, who were witneſſes of what he did and taught.

The text then, you ſee, is brought in as a motive or argument to enforce the apoſtle's exhortation in the beginning of the chapter: and I do not know how I can better ſerve the ends of this day's meeting, than by making uſe of it to the ſame purpoſe.

My buſineſs, at this time, is to call upon all that hear me, to employ this preſent ſeaſon that we are now entering upon, in the examining the ſtate of their ſouls, and repenting of their ſins paſt, and turning to God with all their hearts, by ſeriouſly applying themſelves to the work of religion, if they have hitherto neglected it: and all this in order to the attaining thoſe benefits, that ſalvation which is made over to all true penitents by the goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt. Now what better method can I uſe to prevail upon any of you to put this in practice, than by endeavouring to convince you of your utter inexcuſableneſs, and the impoſſibility of your eſcaping, if you do not? And further, what better argument can I pitch upon, for the convincing you of this inexcuſableneſs, this impoſſibility of your eſcaping; than that which here the apoſtle lays ſo much weight upon, namely, the greatneſs of that ſalvation which you deſpiſe, ſo long as you continue in a ſtate of impenitence? *How ſhall we eſcape*, ſaith he, *if we neglect ſo great ſalvation?* This ſingle

point,

point, when put into a true light, carries in it so many obligations and engagements to make us all forsake our sinful courses, and to lead holy and religious lives, that, where it is duly considered, it can hardly fail of producing that effect. This point, therefore, I beg leave at this time to insist upon, and to apply it, with all the plainness and earnestness I can, to the aforesaid purposes.

Now, the greatness of this salvation which the gospel tenders to us, I shall here consider in these two particulars: First, the greatness of the blessings contained in it. Secondly, the greatness of the encouragements we have to set about it: upon both which accounts it will appear, that we are infinitely inexcusable, so long as we continue to neglect it.

I. I begin with the first head, The greatness of the salvation itself, which our Lord Jesus has made over to us; or the great blessings it containeth in it. In which respect we have just reason to cry out, *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation?*

The salvation of Christ is not like that of Moses, or Joshua, or Gideon, a temporary, secular one; a delivering of us out of the slavery of Egypt; or a putting us into a peaceable possession of a land *flowing with milk and honey*; or a saving us from the invasions and oppressions of our enemies: though these are great salvations, and are celebrated as such in the Old-testament; and it is a salvation of this nature, that the Jews do yet expect from their Messiah: but it is a thing infinitely greater and more desirable.

The salvation which Christ purchased, and the gospel tenders to every creature, is a comprehension of the richest blessings that God can bestow, and a deliverance from the greatest evils that mankind can suffer. It contains in it all that can make the nature of

man

man perfect, or the ſtate of his life haypy; and frees him from all that either doth or can render his condition miſerable. Indeed, the bleſſings of it are great beyond all imagination. *Eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither did enter into the heart of man the things, which God hath prepared for them that love him* [f].

For, in the firſt place, To be ſaved, as Chriſt came to ſave all the world, is to have all our ſins forgiven; all our numberleſs iniquities and tranſgreſſions blotted out; all thoſe heavy loads of guilt which oppreſſed our ſouls, and might even juſtly ſink them into deſperation, quite removed from our minds.

It is to be reconciled to God, and reſtored to his favour and friendſhip; ſo that he ſhall be no longer a conſuming fire, no longer an angry, terrible, revenging God, but a moſt kind, compaſſionate, and tender-hearted father to us.

It is to be at peace with him, and at peace with our own conſciences; and to have a title to his peculiar love, and care, and protection all the days of our lives.

Again, ſecondly, To be ſaved as Chriſt came to ſave the world, is to be reſcued from the crueleſt bondage of our crueleſt enemies; from the dominion of ſin, and the tyranny of the devil.

It is to be tranſlated out of the power of darkneſs into the kingdom of our dear Lord; ſo that *ſin ſhall reign no longer in our mortal bodies*, but *we ſhall ſerve God in the newneſs of the Spirit.*

It is to be aſſerted into a ſtate of true freedom and liberty: ſo that we ſhall be no longer under the controul of blind paſſions; or be hurried on by our impetuous luſts to do thoſe things which our own reaſon doth condemn; but be in ſuch a condition, that we can

[f] 1 Cor. ii. 9.

an diſpoſe of ourſelves according to our own deſires; nd our deſires ſhall be always ſuch as are fit and becoming a reaſonable nature.

It is to have a new principle of life infuſed into us; by the means of which, we ſhall not only live up to he perfection of the human nature, but be made partakers of the divine.

It is to become the temples of the holy Spirit, to have him as a perpetual gueſt and lodger in our hearts; whoſe holy fire will conſume all our droſs and impurity; whoſe comfortable influences will always cheer and refreſh us, and whoſe wiſe counſels will always adviſe, direct, and govern us.

In a word, it is to live like God, to be transformed into his image, and to be made like unto him in wiſdom, and righteouſneſs, and purity, and all other perfections which the nature of man is capable of.

Furthermore, in the third place, to be ſaved, as Chriſt came to ſave us, is to be delivered from the wrath to come; from that dreadful vengeance, which ſhall one day overtake all the world.

When the *heavens ſhall paſs away with* a crackling *noiſe* of fire; *and the elements ſhall melt with fervent heat*; *the earth alſo, and all the works that are therein, ſhall be burnt up* [g].

*When the Lord ſhall deſcend from heaven with a mighty ſhout, with ten thouſands of his angels, to take vengeance in flaming fire, upon all ungodly men, for all the ungodly deeds which they have unrighteouſly committed* [h].

When all men, both ſmall and great, dead and living, ſhall be ſummoned to appear before a dreadful and im-

[g] 1 Pet. iii. 10. [h] 1 Theſſ. ii. 16. 2 Theſ. i. 8. Jude ver. 15.

impartial tribunal, and give an account of all their actions.

When the greateſt and the moſt proſperous ſinners that the ſun ever ſhone upon, ſhall tremble, and ſneak, and be confounded, and ſhould think themſelves happy, if they could hide themſelves in the dens of the mountains: when they ſhall *ſay to the rocks, Fall on us, and cover us from the face of him that ſitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.* whoſe ſalvation we have deſpiſed.

I ſay, from this dreadful day of wrath, and all thoſe amazing terrors that do attend it; and which are but the due portion of them that do evil, doth Chriſt's ſalvation, and his only, ſet us free.

But neither is this the greateſt bleſſing that is contained in this ſalvation. For, in the laſt place, To be ſaved as Chriſt came to ſave the world, is after a holy, and a heavenly, and in ſome meaſure a happy life, in this world, to be tranſlated into a ſtate of endleſs happineſs in another world.

Never to die any more; never to ſuffer the uneaſineſs and infirmities of an earthly body any more; never to know pain or ſickneſs, grief and ſorrow, labour and wearineſs, diſquiet or vexation any more: but to live in perfect eaſe and peace; in perfect freedom and liberty; in a perfect enjoyment of ourſelves, and the greateſt good we can be partakers of, and that in the moſt perfect way, for ever and ever.

It is to have our bodies, that ſlept in the duſt, raiſed again, re-united to our ſouls: but no longer groſs, earthly, corruptible bodies, but ſpiritual, heavenly, immortal ones, faſhioned like unto Chriſt's glorious body, in the which he now ſits at the right hand of God.

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It is to live in the city of the great king, the heavenly Jeruſalem, a country of perpetual light and bliſs, where the glory of the Lord doth fill the place; and, where every object that preſents itſelf, adds a new beauty, and contributes to the increaſe of the delight.

It is to ſpend an eternity in the moſt noble and agreeable employments: in viewing and contemplating the wonderful works of God; in admiring the wiſe contrivances of his providence in all ages; in adoring his infinite love to the ſons of men; in reflecting upon our own inexpreſſible happineſs, that ariſes from his communications to us; and in ſinging everlaſting hymns of praiſe, and joy, and triumph to God, and our Lord Jeſus, upon account of all theſe things.

It is to dwell for ever in a place, where there are no objects of pity or compaſſion, of anger or envy, of hatred or diſtruſt: every perſon there being as happy as he deſires, and all increaſing the happineſs of one another, by their mutual kindneſſes and endearments.

It is to converſe with the moſt delightful company in the world; to be reſtored to the ſociety of all our dear friends and relations that died in the faith of Chriſt, and to have an acquaintance with all the great ſouls, whoſe illuſtrious virtues and atchievements made them famous in their generations.

Laſtly, It is to be with Jeſus Chriſt, and to behold his glory; and to live for ever in ſeeing and enjoying the great God, *in whoſe preſence is the fulneſs of joy, and at whoſe right hand there are pleaſures for evermore.*

This is the ſalvation, which Chriſt hath purchaſed for us. This is the ſalvation, which is offered to all mankind in the goſpel: and now have we not great reaſon

reaſon to cry out with the apoſtle, *How ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great ſalvation?*

Can any thing be ſaid in excuſe for ſuch a wretch, as being convicted of grievous crimes, and thereupon juſtly ſentenced to ſuffer death for them; yet through the powerful interceſſion of the prince with his father, hath not only a pardon offered him, but preferment and honour, and the favour of his ſovereign; doth yet, nevertheleſs, ſtand out againſt theſe overtures, and deſpiſeth theſe undeſerved bounties, and chuſeth rather to die miſerably, than to live happily? I ſay, what can be ſaid in excuſe for ſuch an unaccountable madneſs as this? Who can pity ſuch a ſtupid fool, that will thus, againſt all ſenſe and reaſon, undo himſelf?

Why, brethren, this is juſt our caſe. In as bad a condition are all of us, by reaſon of our offences againſt heaven, as this condemned malefactor, or rather in a much worſe: for the worſt of his puniſhment is but temporal death; but ſpiritual death, and all the horrid conſequences thereof, are the deſerved wages, the juſt recompence of our tranſgreſſions.

But ſo infinitely kind is our God to us, that thro' the mediation of his Son Jeſus, he is willing not to take theſe advantages againſt us; nay, he offers a pardon of all our ſins; nay, not only ſo, but he offers his love, his friendſhip, his favour, which is better than life itſelf. He offers to advance us into the neareſt relation with himſelf; to be the children of the moſt high; to be the brethren of our Lord Jeſus; to be kings and prieſts with his own Son, and heirs together with him, of an eternal inheritance in the heavens, of a *crown of glory that fadeth not away.*

Is it not now the extremeſt ſtupidity in the world, not to cloſe with theſe graious tenders? To be ſo in love with

with ſin and miſery, to be ſo fond of chains and darkneſs, as to deſpiſe theſe unſpeakable bleſſings, which heaven holds forth to us ?

O bleſſed God ! That thou ſhouldſt be ſo rich in mercy, ſo abundant in kindneſs and love, as to propoſe the moſt ineſtimable treaſures of thy grace and favour to the acceptance of every human creature; and that yet moſt of us ſhould be ſo fooliſh, or ſo wretched, as to take little notice of them !

But we, ſhallow things as we are, are bewitched with this preſent world. A few painted bubbles do ſo hold our eyes, that we cannot look up to thoſe glorious, invaluable gems, that are ſo fairly preſented before us.

O the baſe degenerate ſpirits of mankind ! that they ſhould be contented to lead the life of brutes (and it would be well if they could die like them too) when it is in their power to live like angels, and God himſelf !

That they ſhould with patience endure the vaſſalage of the devil, and a thouſand luſts as impure and tyrannical as he ; when they may enjoy the moſt glorious liberty of the ſons of God !

That they ſhould chuſe to ſpend their days in vanity and emptineſs, in folly and miſery, in fanciful ſatisfactions, but in real care and ſorrow ; and after all this, reap nothing but anguiſh and woe, and confuſion for ever ; when they may both live happily here (God, even in this world, requiting them for all the pains and trouble they undergo for his ſake) and, in the world to come, be the nobleſt, the moſt glorious beings that words can expreſs, or the mind of man conceive of !

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O if we would ſit down, and give ourſelves leave calmly to ponder theſe things, how would it be poſſible for us to lead ſuch lives as many of us do! How would it be poſſible for us to live looſely and careleſly without God, without any ſenſe of religion, wholly minding the gratification of our brutiſh, or our worldly inclinations? Theſe arguments are of ſuch force, that it is hard for human nature to ſtand out againſt them, if they be vigorouſly applied to the mind.

If we did heartily believe, and ſeriouſly conſider what the preſent life is, and what will come after: If we did ſedately weigh the infinite diſproportion between a moment and eternity, and what a very trifle even the greateſt buſineſſes, the greateſt enjoyments, and the greateſt ſufferings in this world, muſt needs be thought, in compariſon with the eternal weight of glory, or that everlaſting ſhame and confuſion of face that will be hereafter.

I ſay, if we did in good earneſt attend to theſe things, we could ſcarce avoid the finding a ſtrange and ſpeedy alteration in ourſelves: We ſhould perceive new thoughts, new deſires, new deſigns and reſolutions to ariſe in our minds.

We ſhould, with the greateſt paſſion, cry out, Let us be happy in the next world, and then let what will become of us in this. Deal with us here, O Lord, as thou pleaſeſt, ſcourge us, afflict us, puniſh us, diſpoſe us into what circumſtances thou wilt, let us but reign with Chriſt hereafter, and we have enough.

Were our minds once ſeriouſly affected with theſe things, all the great, and the rich, and the gay things of this world, which uſually carry ſuch magick in them, would look ſo contemptibly, as that we ſhould be amazed at ourſelves, ever to have had ſo little judgment, as once to have put the queſtion, whether

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for their ſakes we ſhould loſe our innocence, and the peace of our minds, and forfeit our title to the favour of God.

O with what noble thoughts and reſolutions would the hopes of living for ever with our Lord Jeſus in his glory, inſpire us! How regular would it make us in all our converſation! How diligent in the mortification of our luſts and evil habits! How ſtrict and ſolemn in the exerciſes of devotion! How ſerious and conſtant in the profeſſion of Chriſt's religion! and how ſolicitous above all things to keep a good conſcience, and to do nothing inconſiſtent with our duty, for the ſerving any ends whatſoever!

II. But I have dwelt too long upon this head. I paſs on to the other general point which I mentioned, touching the greatneſs of this ſalvation; and which will ſtill farther extremely aggravate our neglect of it; and that is, the greatneſs of the encouragement we have given us to ſet about it. In this reſpect alſo we have reaſon to cry out, *How ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great ſalvation?*

Now, under this head, of the encouragements that God hath given every chriſtian, to apply himſelf to obtaining this ſalvation, I ſhall inſiſt on theſe three particulars:

Firſt, The eaſineſs of the terms, upon which he offers it.

Secondly, His readineſs to accept even the greateſt ſinners that will ſet themſelves about it.

Thirdly, The great aſſiſtances he doth afford, for the obtaining of it. Of each of theſe very briefly.

And firſt of all, let us put the text thus: *How ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great ſalvation*; which may be had upon ſuch eaſy terms?

It is true, God, when he propoſes ſalvation to us in the goſpel, dealeth with us as a maſter doth with his ſervants; we muſt do ſome work before we have our wages: If, indeed, ſalvation can in any ſenſe be called wages, and not rather the gratuitous bounty of God; ſince there is no proportion at all between the work we do, and the reward we receive for that work. But ſome work we muſt do, and therefore we are bid to work out our ſalvation. Some ſervices are to be performed on our parts, otherwiſe we are not to expect to enter into our Maſter's joy.

But then, ſo infinitely kind a maſter we have, and ſo noble, ſo rational, ſo ingenuous a ſervice he hath put upon us; that the very eaſineſs of his terms will be one of the blackeſt aggravations of our baſeneſs and inexcuſable guilt, in refuſing his ſalvation.

If the conditions that God requireth of us had been ſuch as are repreſented in the ſixth of Micah, where the prophet brings in a man ſpeaking after this manner: *Wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord, and bow myſelf before the moſt high God? Will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of rams, or ten thouſand rivers of oil? Or ſhall I give my firſt-born for my tranſgreſſion, the fruit of my body for the ſin of my ſoul?* I ſay, if the terms of recommending ourſelves to God had been ſuch as theſe, we had ſome reaſon to complain of the ſeverity of them; and conſequently ſome excuſe for our not being ſo forward to ſet upon that ſalvation which was promiſed upon them: they being neither good in themſelves, nor practicable to the moſt. For at this rate, none but very rich or very cruel hard-hearted men could be ſuppoſed to go to heaven.

But when, as the prophet goes on, God hath commanded us only *thoſe things that are good. And what doth*

*doth the Lord require of us, but to do juſtly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God?* I ſay, ſince this is our caſe, what excuſe can be made for that man, that will not purchaſe everlaſting ſalvation at ſo eaſy a price as this?

Certain it is, that the terms of our future happineſs, as they are propoſed by our Saviour, are made up of duties, which are of themſelves ſo agreeable to the make and frame of our nature; do ſo highly tend to the improvement and perfection of our faculties; nay, and are ſo needful to our happineſs and well-being in this world; that we muſt of neceſſity, if we would not be miſerable, have impoſed them as a law upon ourſelves, though God had not obliged us to them. And can it be accounted hard uſage in God, to promiſe eternal rewards to the doing of thoſe things, which we ſhould have thought reaſonable to be done, though no ſuch rewards had been promiſed?

Are we not very hardly dealt with, think you, to have all the glories of heaven offered to us upon ſuch conditions as theſe; that we will live up to the dignity of our natures; that we will lead the life of men, and not of brute creatures; and that we will endeavour in this world, to make our being as happy as we can, by the practice of virtue and righteouſneſs? And yet theſe are the terms, upon which God hath offered ſalvation to mankind in the goſpel. O wonderful ſeverity! O heavy burdens, not to be endured upon our ſhoulders!

What ſhall we ſay to the perverſeneſs of ſenſual men? The greateſt pleaſures that are to be had on earth, are ſo terrible to them, that for their ſakes they dare not caſt a look towards the happineſs of heaven. Such ſelf-denying creatures they are, that rather than

be as happy as is poſſible in this world, they will venture eternal miſery in the world to come.

How is it poſſible to lay a ſurer foundation for eaſe and peace, and the enjoyment of ourſelves in all ſtates and conditions of life, than to have a hearty ſenſe of God's preſence and goodneſs? to love him, who is the moſt lovely object in the world; to believe his revelations, who is truth itſelf; to depend upon him in all our neceſſities; and to rejoice continually in the expreſſions of his kindneſs and bounty to us: to procure to ourſelves as many friends, and as few enemies as is poſſible, by being true, and faithful, and juſt in our dealings, and exerciſing meekneſs, and charity, and kindneſs, and forgiveneſs to all men; to live in a ſober and moderate uſe of all the good things of this life; to keep our paſſions and appetites within ſuch bounds, as ſhall neither diſturb our health, nor our underſtandings, nor the eaſe and quiet of our minds. In a word, to govern ourſelves, and all our actions, by the laws of the beſt and moſt perfect reaſon.

What, I ſay, can be more natural, or more delightful? Or, what can more contribute to a comfortable and happy life in this world, than the practice of theſe things? And yet theſe are the dreadful burdens that Chriſt has laid upon us: theſe are the terrible bugbears that fright us from endeavouring after that everlaſting ſalvation which he offers to us in the goſpel.

I know it will be ſaid, that repentance and mortification, and diſengaging ourſelves from vicious habits, which is neceſſary to be done in order to ſalvation, are not ſuch delightful things; but are very uneaſy and troubleſome. I anſwer, ſo is phyſic very troubleſome and uneaſy to a ſick man; but when it has performed

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its effects, then health and joy succeeds in the place of it.

But besides, as the hardship of these duties lasts but a very little while, so even during the time it doth last, a man's life is much more easy and comfortable, than while he lived a slave to his lusts, and was perpetually haunted with an evil conscience. And this every man in the world, that ever tried, must needs acknowledge; religion, even when its severities are the greatest (which is at the entrance of it) yet yields more peace, and happiness, and satisfaction, than a life that is led without it.

So that, upon the consideration of the whole matter, the terms, upon which Christ hath promised this great salvation, must be acknowledged so highly reasonable, so extremely easy, that there will be no pretence of excuse left for that man, no possibility of his escaping, that doth neglect it.

Especially, if we add to this, in the second place, the universality with which it is offered.

It is tendered most seriously and affectionately to all sorts of men: none are excluded; no, not the greatest sinners. How bad soever our lives have formerly been; how much soever our consciences are oppressed with the guilt of sin; yet if we will close with our Saviour's terms (and very easy ones you see they are) he is ready to bestow his salvation upon us. This also is another consideration, which, as it gives us the greatest encouragement to set about this work, so it will make us appear still more inexcusable and unpitiable, if we do not. How shall we escape, if we neglect a salvation which is tendered so freely, so unreservedly to all sinners (even the greatest) without exception?

It is a ſenſe of guilt that oftentimes makes men more guilty. It is deſpair of mercy that often ſtops up the way to amendment, and carries men on to ſtill more wicked and deſperate courſes: but to have hopes, nay, to have aſſurance of forgiveneſs and mercy, muſt needs ſure have quite other effects.

For the great God to proclaim his general pardon to all his rebellious creatures; nay, not only ſo, but to entreat them, to beſeech them to accept of it, promiſing withal his favour and eternal life if they do; ſure this kind uſage is able to melt any ingenuous mind into the moſt willing and hearty ſubmiſſions: Sure he muſt be a ſtrange kind of creature, that is not won by ſo much goodneſs, to lay aſide his enmity againſt heaven, and to reconcile himſelf to his God, ſhall I ſay? or to his tender-hearted Father.

O my brethren! to conſider the ſtrange, ſurprizing, unexpected mercy that is made over to ſinners in the goſpel; how ought it to affect us? How ought it to arouſe the moſt ſtupid, inſenſible mortals, and inflame them with a deſire of returning to their gracious God, from whom they have ſo long wandered in the mazes of folly and ſin?

It is not only the righteous and innocent that ſhall have benefit by the blood of Chriſt; thoſe, that thro' a good education, and a virtuous diſpoſition, have, in a great meaſure, eſcaped the pollutions of the world, and have all their lives long given up themſelves to the ſervice of Jeſus Chriſt: I ſay, it is not to theſe only that the mercies of the goſpel are extended (though of all others, theſe are the moſt happy people) but the gate is open, even to the prodigal children, thoſe that have *waſted all their father's ſubſtance in lewdneſs, and rioteous living:* even theſe the Father is ready to receive with

with open arms, if they can but have the heart to return to him.

O, hearken to this, and consider it, all you (if there be any such persons here) that have hitherto lived loosely and carelessly; that have never minded God and his religion, but have pursued a course of vice and sensuality, and wickedness all your lives long; that have given the reins to your brutish passions and appetites, and have, with a high hand, affronted and provoked the Majesty of heaven and earth by your repeated transgressions.

Yet, as bad as you are; as loudly as your sins do cry to heaven for vengeance, your case is not desperate, if you can repent.

Desperate, did I say? The gate of mercy is open to you, the great God waits for you, and is ready to receive and embrace you.

Christ Jesus shed his blood for you, even for you; and begs, and entreats you to come and partake of the benefits thereof.

The angels of God do wish for your conversion, and there will be joy in heaven at the news of it.

And all this, we that are the ministers of Christ's gospel, have authority from him to publish and declare to you; and therefore, we do beseech you, in Christ's stead, that you would be reconciled unto God.

It is not yet too late; you may yet be everlastingly happy, if you will consider and turn: Christ yet offers you his salvation. The Lord himself speaks to you: *Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well. And then, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool* [e].



[a] Isa. i. 16.

O my brethren! having theſe kind invitations; having theſe reviving hopes, theſe aſſurances of God's mercy; Why ſhould any of us be wicked any longer? Why ſhould we go on a ſtep farther towards our own undoing? Why ſhould we not preſently break looſe from our ſins, and go whither our gracious God ſo lovingly calls us, to his mercy, to his favour, to our own everlaſting ſalvation?

But if, after all theſe aſtoniſhing overtures of grace and goodneſs, you ſtill harden your hearts, and neglect this great ſalvation, be you yourſelves judges, whether you ſhall deſerve any favour, any pity, or compaſſion, when you come moſt to need it, and when, in the anguiſh of your ſouls, you bitterly cry out for it.

O! it will be a ſtinging conſideration one day, to think of the greatneſs of that mercy that you do now reject: to think how often God called you, but you refuſed: how often he ſtretched forth his hand, to have kept you from that deſtruction you were ſo eagerly purſuing, but you did not regard him: how often he *would have gathered you to him, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not.*

Then will you ſadly wiſh that you had, *in this your day underſtood the things that belong to your peace:* but it will be too late, they will then be hid from your eyes.

But, thirdly and laſtly, to conclude: Our neglect of Chriſt's ſalvation will ſtill appear more criminal and inexcuſable, if we conſider the encouragement we have to ſet about it, upon account of the great aſſiſtances that God is ready to afford us for the obtaining of it.

It is natural for men, when they are beaten out of other excuſes, to fetch apologies for their neglect, or

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ſlothfulneſs in any buſineſs that is preſſed upon them, from the greatneſs of the work, and their own want of ſtrength and ability to go through it. And here it is, that the ſenſual and careleſs among us, notwithſtanding what has been hitherto repreſented, will be apt to take refuge.

Though heaven (ſay they) be a glorious place, and the way to it plainly enough deſcribed; yet it is a very long journey, and we muſt expect to meet with many difficulties in it. Whatever you talk of the reaſonableneſs and the eaſineſs of that courſe of life that leads to it; yet we find, by our own trials, that it is very hard for fleſh and blood to live after that rate of ſtrictneſs.

The temptations to ſin are every where ſo many, and ſo powerful; and our own ſtrength for the reſiſting of them, ſo little and inconſiderable; that we may, in ſome meaſure, be excuſed, if we be not ſo forward in the undertaking, or ſo ſucceſsful in the managing of ſuch an affair as this.

But O, how vain are theſe allegations! as if you had no ſupports againſt theſe diſcouragements; but Chriſt had left you to work out your ſalvation entirely by your own ſtrength. Do but caſt your eyes upwards, and look at the mighty ſuccours, which Chriſt Jeſus holds forth to you; and you will confeſs, that were thoſe weakneſſes you complain of, thoſe difficulties you have to conflict with, much more conſiderable than they are; yet they are not to be accounted of, they are not to be named, being ſo exceedingly overbalanced by thoſe divine powers and aids which God will derive upon you, if you will ſeriouſly engage in this work.

Chriſt Jeſus hath not only purchaſed a kingdom for you, and taught you the way to arrive to it, but he hath purchaſed the Holy Spirit, to be your continual aſſiſtant in your way thither.

He hath not only ſet you a glorious example, and bid you to follow him, but he hath ſent down the Holy Ghoſt, as his vicegerent upon earth, to conduct you to that bleſſed place where he is.

You have the grace and the preſence of the living God always ready at hand, if you ſeriouſly pray for it, to ſtrengthen your weakneſſes, to aſſiſt your endeavours, to enlighten your minds, to fortify your wills, to excite your affections, to ſupport you under all temptations, and, in a word, to fight all the Lord's battles with you; provided you be ſincere and honeſt in the proſecution of that glorious warfare, which God hath called you out into.

What can you deſire more than this? God hath promiſed, That *he will never leave you, nor forſake you* [b]. You are aſſured by his apoſtle, That *greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world* [b]. And another apoſtle doubts not to affirm, That *nothing ſhall be able to ſeparate you from the love of God, which is in Chriſt Jeſus; neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things preſent, nor things to come, nor heighth, nor depth, nor any other creature* [d]. Nothing under heaven, except yourſelves, can do you any miſchief.

And now, this being our caſe, what muſt be ſaid of us, if we be not virtuous and happy? How ſhall we think to eſcape, if we neglect a ſalvation, for the obtaining

[b] Heb. xiii. 5. [c] 1 John iv. 4. [d] Rom. viii. 38, 39.

taining of which we have such mighty succours and assistance afforded to us?

O let these considerations fire us into brave and worthy thoughts! let us make no more vain excuses: let us no longer pretend I know not what difficulties; but let us chearfully and resolvedly apply ourselves to the working out our salvation; knowing, That as it is God which worketh in us the will, so the same God will also work in us the power of doing it.

We have no reason to be afraid of any thing, to be discouraged at any thing; for God Almighty is with us; God Almighty, that made us, still takes care of us, and is ready for ever to assist all his faithful servants in all their extremities.

Christ Jesus, our high priest, sits at the right hand of God, and continually makes intercession for us.

The Holy Spirit never fails to vouchsafe his presence in the souls of all well-disposed persons, to carry them thro' all dangers, through all difficulties, through all temptations.

In a word, we need fear nothing, so long as we design and resolve well, and endeavour to do well; for both Father, Son, and Holy Ghost have engaged themselves in the salvation of all such persons.

*To which eternal God*, &c.

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# SERMON VI.

## The duty and advantages of frequently receiving the Holy Sacrament.

LUKE xxii. 19.

——*This do in remembrance of me.*

I Hope it will not be thought unſeaſonable, if on this day, on which our Saviour ſuffered, I entertain you with a diſcourſe of that holy ſacrament, which was on purpoſe inſtituted by him, for the commemoration of thoſe his ſufferings: For as this argument will lead me to treat of moſt of thoſe things which are the proper ſubjects of our meditations at this time; ſo, conſidering that all of us who are religiouſly diſpoſed, are preparing ourſelves to partake of that holy feaſt on Eaſter-day, a ſermon upon that myſtery may be of ſome uſe to us in that reſpect, eſpecially, it being an argument which is not often treated of in this place.

Three things I beg leave to lay before you relating to this ſacrament

I. Firſt,

I. First, The obligation that lies upon all christians to communicate in it, and to communicate frequently.

II. Secondly, The benefits and advantages we shall receive by so practising.

III. Thirdly, The little or no weight that there is in the common pretences, which usually keep people from this frequent communicating.

I. I begin with the first thing, *viz.* the *obligation that lies upon all christians to receive the sacrament, and to receive it frequently:* And here I take my rise from our Saviour's words that I have now read to you, *Do this*, saith he, *in remembrance of me.*

These are the words by which he did institute or appoint for ever this sacred mystery of the communion. Here he gives a commandment to his disciples, that they should do this in remembrance of him. But what is it they must do? Why, the words going before do inform us: They must do that which Christ now did; that is, they must take bread, and bless it, and break it, and give it: This they must do in remembrance of Christ. Now, if it was the duty of the apostles, and those that succeeded them in the ministry of the church, thus to take bread, and bless it, and break it, and give it; then certainly it must be the duty of all christians committed to their care, to receive, and eat the bread so taken, and blessed, and broken, and given, in remembrance of Christ: And the same likewise as to the cup, which our Saviour appointed to go along with it.

You see then, in the first place, That the receiving of the sacrament is a necessary and a perpetual duty, incumbent upon all Christians; for it is expressly commanded by our Saviour, and the reason

of the command doth extend to all perſons, and to all ages of the world: *Do this*, ſays he, *in remembrance of me*: And to the ſame purpoſe St. Paul, 1 Cor. xi. 26. *As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do ſhew forth the Lord's death till he come.* If now it be a perpetual duty to remember Chriſt; if it be a perpetual duty to ſhew forth his death till he comes; then it muſt of neceſſity be a duty to make uſe of thoſe ſymbols and ceremonies that he hath appointed to remember him, and to ſhew forth his death by; and it muſt be a duty thus to do to the world's end, becauſe Chriſt is not to come till then. And farther, if it be a duty to remember Chriſt, and to ſhew forth his death frequently; and the more frequently we do it, the better chriſtians we are, as is on all hands acknowledged; then, in the ſame degree and proportion, ought we to think ourſelves obliged to frequent participation of this ſacrament.

But, Secondly, That we ſhould thus join in giving and receiving the ſacrament of the Lord's ſupper in remembrance of Chriſt, is not only his expreſs command, but ſuch a command, that, if we conſider the time, in which it was given, and the circumſtances likewiſe, with which he gave it, we cannot but be ſenſible, that we ought to have a moſt eſpecial particular regard to it. This was in a manner the laſt command he gave to his diſciples: He was now going to part from them, and to do the greateſt kindneſs for mankind that ever was done: He was going to lay down his life, as an offering for the ſins of men, and by his death to procure everlaſting ſalvation for them: and now, at parting, he deſires this particular thing of them, which he would have obſerved by them, and all that came after them; namely, that

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in memory of him they would bleſs bread and wine, and eat and drink them for his ſake. Ought not theſe circumſtances to be a ſtrange endearment of this inſtitution, to all that profeſs themſelves his diſciples? Will not every good-natured ingenuous man, that conſiders theſe things, be naturally apt to put a more than ordinary value upon thoſe dear pledges that our dying Saviour hath thus bequeathed to us? Or is it poſſible that any one can ſo much as pretend to love our Lord Jeſus, and yet be ſo inſenſible of his laſt commands, and the circumſtances wherewith they were given, as to live in a conſtant and wilful neglect of them?

But this is not all that doth recommend this duty to us. There is this farther thing, in the third place, to be conſidered: This is, in a manner, the peculiar command of our Saviour, the only proper act of chriſtian worſhip that he hath appointed. To aſſemble together in public for the ſervice of God: for the aſking pardon for our ſins; for the begging mercies and favours from him; for the returning our thanks, and praiſes, and acknowledgments for benefits received; and alſo for the receiving inſtructions and admonitions about our moral converſation, and the truths and duties of our religion, is common to all the religions in the world: Both Jews and Turks do this as well as Chriſtians: But to join together in commemorating the death of Chriſt, is the peculiar duty that is incumbent on us, as we profeſs to be the followers of Jeſus. It is the diſtinguiſhing badge of our profeſſion: It is an act of worſhip that our Lord hath ordained, for our evidencing to all the world, that we are his diſciples, and that we own him to be our Lord and maſter. And therefore, though in our

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other offices of devotion we may be truly ſaid to worſhip God, and to give honour to our Saviour; yet we cannot be ſaid ſo properly to worſhip as chriſtians, except we join in thoſe ſacred myſteries that Chriſt has made peculiar to his own religion: And upon this account it was, that the primitive chriſtians looked upon this ſervice of the communion as ſo neceſſary, ſo eſſential a part of the chriſtian worſhip, that they never held their public aſſemblies without it; and none of the faithful, in thoſe days, that came to prayers, went away till they had been partakers of the ſacrament. This conſideration ſurely ought to lay a mighty obligation upon all that call themſelves by the name of Chriſt, and would be thought his daily worſhippers, to omit no opportunity that is offered them, of doing homage to their Saviour in this way.

But fourthly and laſtly, To give you a farther argument of our obligation to the frequent practice of this duty, let me a little more particularly inſiſt on the end, for which this ſacrament was inſtituted, as it is here aſſigned by our Saviour: *Do this*, ſays he, *in remembrance of me.* The great buſineſs of this ſacred myſtery is to commemorate the death of our Lord, and the benefits we receive thereby; and to expreſs our thankfulneſs to God and him for them. Now can any man profeſs himſelf a chriſtian, and yet not think himſelf obliged to take every occaſion of doing this; nay, and to be glad when ſuch an occaſion is offered? Doth all the great love of our Saviour, in laying down his life, and thereby purchaſing eternal happineſs for us, not deſerve ſo much as a remembrance? Are there no thanks due to him for the inexpreſſible humiliation of himſelf, to take our fleſh upon him; and in that fleſh to undergo God knows how many ſorrows

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and afflictions for our ſakes; and, at laſt, for our ſakes to expoſe himſelf to an ignominious tormenting crucifixion, that *thro' his ſtripes we might be healed*, thro' his death we might obtain life? What, I ſay, is not all this worthy of ſome remembrance, ſome thanks? Yes, certainly, every one among us, that believes Chriſt to have done and ſuffered all this for us, muſt needs think, we ought to remember this great kindneſs as long as we live, and to give him continual thanks for it. But yet let me tell you, the only ſolemn way that he hath appointed for our commemoration of theſe his benefits, and expreſſing our thankfulneſs for them, is this of receiving the ſacrament: *Do this in remembrance of me:* This is the great purpoſe and intent of it: This is the way, in which Chriſt will be remembered and thanked for his favours: And ſure it is very idle to think of any other methods than what he himſelf hath appointed; and they muſt be intolerably ungrateful that will not do thus much for him. If our Saviour, for the commemoration of his benefits, and the ſhewing our thankfulneſs for them, had commanded us ſome extremely ſevere thing (as among ſeveral of the pagan nations their commemorative myſteries, in honour of their deities, were cruel and ſevere enough) we might then, indeed, have had ſome colourable excuſe for our ſeldom or unfrequent expreſſions of our obedience to his commands: But now, when he requires no more of us, than to come to his table, and there to eat and drink in remembrance of him, and in token of our thankfulneſs to him; they muſt either be no believers, or have very little ſenſe of his kindneſs, that can eaſily abſent themſelves, and deny him ſuch expreſſions of their gratitude.

I must confess to you, these things seem to me to carry so much weight and force in them, that I cannot but wonder how it comes to pass that our communions are generally so little frequented; nay, that they are not as full as our assemblies for prayers or sermons; the duty being so very necessary, and the performance of it so little troublesome, and withal, the benefits that accrue to us from the due performance of it, being so many, and so great. Of which I now come to speak, that being the second head I am to discourse of.

II. In the second place, As for the benefits and advantages which we shall reap by a conscientious discharge of our duty in this matter, they are truly great, I may say invaluable. Indeed, in all the instances wherein God has laid his commands upon us, we may, from the obedience we yield to them, certainly promise to ourselves great blessings and rewards; for all God's commandments are for our good, and not for his. But this holds in none more than in this particular instance we are now speaking of. Three things I shall briefly represent to you upon this head; and they are of so great moment, that whoever considers them, cannot but be convinced, that it is extremely to his own loss and prejudice, that he doth at any time neglect the opportunities that are afforded him of approaching to the Lord's table.

First of all, The sacrament of the Lord's supper is the great and solemn means that Christ has appointed in his church to all christians, for the obtaining the pardon and forgiveness of their sins committed since their baptism. As the sacrament of baptism was instituted by Christ, for the entering men into covenant with God, by the means whereof all the sins they were guilty

guilty of before they became chriſtians, were forgiven; ſo this other ſacrament of his ſupper was inſtituted for the renewing that covenant with God, by the means whereof all their ſins ſince their baptiſm are remitted to them, and a conveyance likewiſe made of all the other benefits of Chriſt's ſacrifice on the croſs.

This is the doctrine of the catholic church in this matter of the two ſacraments: And it will receive ſome light from the two great ſacraments among the Jews, circumciſion and ſacrifices, which were eminent types and figures of our baptiſm and the Lord's ſupper.

Among the Jews, the way that God appointed for the entering perſons into covenant with him, was circumciſion: And whoever was circumciſed, was entitled thereby to all the benefits and advantages that were promiſed and made over by that covenant. And the ſame thing we ſay, as to all thoſe that are entered into the new covenant of Jeſus Chriſt by baptiſm. Well now, but if an Iſraelite thus entered into covenant with God, happened afterwards to tranſgreſs any law of God; before he could obtain forgiveneſs, and be reſtored to God's favour, he muſt offer ſuch ſacrifices as the law had appointed in that caſe: And by offering theſe ſacrifices he renewed his covenant with God, and was admitted to that ſtate, which by his ſin he had forfeited. And the very way of offering up theſe ſacrifices did very lively repreſent this: For when a man brought any of this kind of ſacrifices, after that ſacrifice had been offered to God, part of it was burnt upon the altar, which was God's portion; and another part of it was given back to the man that brought it, for him to feaſt upon with his family: By which was ſignified, That the man thus eating of God's meat,

meat, and feeding, as it were, at God's table, was reſtored to his grace and favour, and in covenant with him: Eating and drinking together, being the ceremony uſed among all nations, for the expreſſing friendſhip and reconciliation, and for the ratifying leagues and covenants.

Now to the ſame uſe and purpoſe, ſay we, ſerves our ſacrament of the Lord's ſupper; or, as it was called by the antients the chriſtian ſacrifice: Not that we pretend, in our communions, to offer up the real body and blood of Chriſt in ſacrifice to God, as the papiſts do; for that, as the apoſtle tells us, was once done by himſelf upon the croſs, and *by that one offering he hath for ever perfected all them that are ſanctified*; ſo that there is no need of any ſuch offering any more: But we commemorate that ſacrifice which Chriſt has on this day made for us; and we thank God for it; and we heartily beſeech him, that he would accept of it on our behalf, and that it may make atonement for all our ſins: And we likewiſe feed upon it, as the Jews did upon their ſacrifices; that is to ſay; by eating of that bread which he made to be his body, and drinking of that cup which he made to be his blood. Now, in doing of this, we may be truly ſaid both to offer up a ſacrifice to God, and likewiſe to keep a feaſt upon this ſacrifice. We offer up, by commemoration, and thankſgiving, and hearty prayer, that ſacrifice that was once offered by Jeſus Chriſt at Jeruſalem, near ſeventeen hundred years ago, for the ſalvation of all mankind: And we partake both of the body and blood of that his ſacrifice, by partaking of the bread and wine that he has conſecrated not only to be the ſymbols and ſigns of them, but to convey the real benefits of his paſſion and ſacri-

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ce to all believers: So that we may be truly ſaid to ed at God's table, whenever we receive the ſacra- ment; and, if we come worthily diſpoſed, to have all ur paſt ſins blotted out, and to be received into his race, and favour, and friendſhip; which is all that mean by renewing our covenant with him.

But, that I may not ſeem to ground ſo important a doctrine as this is, merely upon the types and figures of the Old-teſtament, I ought to tell you, That all I have ſaid is ſufficiently clear, both from our Saviour's own words in the inſtitution of this ſacrament, and likewiſe from St. Paul. Our Saviour calls the cup of the ſacrament, *The new covenant in his blood:* [a] Or, as it is in another evangeliſt, *The blood of the new covenant, which was ſhed for many for the remiſſion of ſins.* [b] St. Paul likewiſe tells us, That *the cup of bleſſing which we bleſs, and the bread which we break, is the communion of the body and blood of Chriſt* [c]: The ſenſe of which is plainly this, That theſe ſacred ſigns make them that uſe them, to have communion with Chriſt crucified. The partaking of the bread, and of the cup, is the means that God hath appointed for our partaking of the benefits of Chriſt's body that was broken, and of his blood that was ſhed for us; that is to ſay, the forgiveneſs of our ſins, and all the other fruits and advantages of his paſſion.

Is not this now a conſideration that ſhould ſtrongly oblige all Chriſtians to a frequent participation of this ſacrament? Can any thing more recommend this ordinance to us, than the thoughts that it cancels all the ſcores between God and us, provided we come prepared as we ought to be? That it put us into a ſtate of his favour, and enters us into ſo ſtrict a league of friendſhip

[a] Luke xxii. 20. [b] Mat. xxvi. 28. [c] Cor. x. 16.

friendſhip with him, as not all the powers of earth and hell can diſſolve, unleſs we ourſelves be traitors to ourſelves.

Theſe are great things; but theſe are not all: For, in the ſecond place, another advantage we have by the ſacrament is, That it is in itſelf an excellent inſtrument for the making men grow in virtue and goodneſs.

That ſerious reflection upon a man's own ways; that careful examination and enquiry into the ſtate of his own ſoul; thoſe expreſſions of ſorrow and repentance for what he finds amiſs in himſelf; and the earneſt prayers he makes to God for his grace, together with the hearty reſolutions he enters into, of a better obedience for the future: All which things are neceſſary preparations for the worthy partaking of this ſolemn myſtery, eſpecially in one that comes but ſeldom to it (for indeed the caſe is otherwiſe as to thoſe that ſo live, as to be always prepared for it, and accordingly do take all occaſions of receiving it) I ſay, theſe things are the likelieſt means in the world, not only to keep up in a man the ſenſe of virtue and piety towards God, but alſo to reſtore it, when through careleſsneſs it is in a manner quite loſt; or, if it be not loſt or decayed, to increaſe and advance it, and to make it much clearer and brighter than ever it was.

O! how ought this conſideration to prevail with all perſons that make a conſcience of religion, and endeavour to ſerve God as well as they can, and mean to perſevere in that courſe of life; to take every occaſion that is offered to partake of this divine ordinance! Such is the nature of our ſouls, while they are pent up in theſe earthly tabernacles, and ſurrounded with ſenſible objects, that the ſpiritual impreſſions that are

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ſtampt upon them muſt be continually renewed, or elſe, in a little time, they will be quite defaced and loſt: The moſt ardent love to God and virtue will by degrees flag and grow cold, unleſs it be by ſome means or other frequently excited. Wiſely therefore, and admirably for our advantage, hath our Lord Jeſus contrived this means of the holy ſacrament, for the preventing or remedying theſe inconveniencies. By obliging us to a frequent communication in this divine office, he hath put us upon the neceſſity of ſo often thinking and meditating on ſpiritual matters, of impreſſing upon our ſouls all thoſe arguments that at firſt prevailed with us to enter upon a courſe of virtue, and of reinforcing all our vows and reſolutions to give up ourſelves to the ſervice of God; that it will not be an eaſy matter to forget our duty, or to relapſe from our good purpoſes.

And the nature of the myſtery itſelf is ſuch, that nothing in the world can be better contrived for the attaining theſe ends; that is to ſay, for the working in us a perfect hatred of all ſin and wickedneſs, and raiſing up our affections to the moſt paſſionate love of our Saviour. Since there we have, in the moſt ſenſible manner, repreſented to us the infinite unſpeakable kindneſs that the Son of God expreſſed to the ſons of men, in laying down his life for them; and the infinite malignity that is in ſin, which was ſo odious to the pure eyes of God, that nothing leſs than the blood of his own Son could make expiation for it.

Whoever therefore is now piouſly diſpoſed, and intends to go on in that good way, and to grow better and better, let him, as frequently as he can, make uſe of this means which God hath appointed for theſe very ends. This is the beſt way to make the grain of

muſtard-ſeed, ſown in our hearts, to become a great tree. This is the ſureſt method, not only to keep the ſmoaking flax from being quenched, but to make it blaze out in flames.

Which we ſhall be farther convinced of, if we conſider, in the third place, another advantage which we reap by this ſacrament; and that is this, That it doth not only miniſter to the promoting piety and holineſs, by making us more ſerious, and putting us more upon the exerciſe of devotion; but alſo, in this reſpect, that it is a means whereby more grace and ſtrength is derived to us from the Holy Spirit of Chriſt.

We have already ſaid, That our Lord ordained this ſacrament as the general inſtrument whereby he would actually apply to believers all the benefits of his paſſion. Now the benefits that Chriſt purchaſed for us by his death were not only the pardon of our ſins, of which we have ſpoken before, but alſo the grace and aſſiſtance of his Holy ſpirit, in order to our performing thoſe conditions which he hath required of us. Now, as the partaking of this ſacrament is the ſtanding ordinary means of receiving the former benefit, namely, the pardon of our ſins; ſo is it alſo of receiving the latter; that is, the ſtrength, and ſupport, and influences of the Holy Spirit. By partaking of theſe holy myſteries as we ſhould do, we are made *one with Chriſt and Chriſt with us*, as our church expreſſes it; we become living branches of the true vine, and, conſequently derive all that vital juice and ſap from Chriſt our root, that is needful for our bringing forth good fruit. This is the proper method to allure down the divine Spirit of Jeſus to come and dwell with us; to oblige him to take up his habitation in our hearts, ſo that we ſhall be truly the temples of the living God.

O! what an inducement ought this to be to us to make ourſelves conſtant gueſts at this holy feaſt, ſince we may there get ſtrength againſt all our infirmities, phyſick for all our diſeaſes, ſupport againſt all the evils that oppreſs us! Are there any of us that are hard put to it, either through the prevailing infirmities of our natures, or thoſe that our evil cuſtoms have brought upon us? Are there any of us that want ſtrength or courage to grapple with our ſpiritual enemies, or to reſiſt thoſe temptations that daily make aſſaults upon us in our way of living? Why here we may have remedy. By coming frequently, and conſcientiouſly, and devoutly to this feaſt of God, we may gain ſuch refreſhment, ſuch ſupport, ſuch ſtrength and power, as will enable us to go thro' our work chearfully and ſucceſsfully; ſuch ſuccours as will not fail, if we faithfully make uſe of them, to vanquiſh all our ſpiritual adverſaries; and laſtly, ſuch comfort and peace of mind, as will make our lives tolerably eaſy under all the difficulties, and troubles, and calamities of this miſerable world.

And now theſe conſiderations, one would think, ſhould ſufficiently recommend the frequent practice of this peace of religion to all of us, that have either any love to God, or regard to their own happineſs: But notwithſtanding all this, there are ſome ſuch fatal prejudices that men have too often taken up concerning this ſacrament, that all diſcourſes of this nature are generally ineffectual. Some of theſe therefore I ſhall endeavour, in the third and laſt place, to remove out of the way, and ſo conclude.

III. The prejudices and miſapprehenſions that men lie under as to this buſineſs, and which uſually fright them from coming to the ſacrament, are very many;

but the greateſt and moſt common of them are theſe two following: The general ſenſe that men have of their own unfitneſs to receive it; and the infinite danger they run, if they ſhould happen to receive unworthily. Upon theſe two accounts it is that many, that are otherwiſe well diſpoſed perſons, dare not come to the Lord's table: They are ſo affrighted with the apprehenſion of their own guilt, and their unworthineſs to partake of ſo ſolemn a myſtery; and likewiſe with the terrible puniſhment that is threatened to all thoſe that receive unworthily, that they think it much better wholly to abſent themſelves from the ſacrament, than run the hazard they muſt do, by taking it in the circumſtances they are. Theſe two things I ſhall, at this time, briefly ſpeak to.

And firſt, It is commonly urged by the generality of men, as an excuſe for abſenting themſelves from the ſacrament, That they are no way qualified for it: they are not in a condition of coming to the Lord's table, by reaſon of the remiſſneſs and careleſſneſs of their lives, and their falling ſo many degrees ſhort of that holineſs the goſpel of Chriſt requires of them.

But to this let me ſay, in the firſt place, Whoſe fault is this? Why do we not all live better? Who hinders us from being ſo good as we ought to be? either it is in our power to live ſo, as may put us into a condition of worthily performing this inſtance of our duty to our Lord, or it is not in our power: If it be in our power, then we cannot in the leaſt plead this for an excuſe of our not doing it: If it be not in our power, then we can contract no new guilt by coming to receive, though we ſhould prove to receive unworthily, provided we have done the beſt we can. But in God's name, how dare we live at ſuch a rate, that

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we are incapable of joining in the principal part of the christian worship? Nothing in the world can unqualify us for that, but what, at the same time, doth render us unqualified for the kingdom of heaven: and dare we live so, that, if God should this day call us out of the world, we should think ourselves in a state of damnation?

But, secondly, Tho' we do not live so well as we desire; though our lives be not so holy, and so pure, and so heavenly, as may become the partakers of so divine a mystery as that of the sacrament is; yet let us not for this wholly absent ourselves from it: nay, rather let us come the oftener to it, for that is the means to make us better. It is the most effectual course we can take to promote virtue and piety in ourselves: whereas, if we never come at all, we take the direct way to be always as bad as we are, or rather to grow worse and worse.

Would any one advise a sensual careless man, by no means to take a bible into his hands, or to come to prayers, or to hear sermons, because he is very unfit for, and unworthy of such exercises? No surely, he will rather propose the use of these things to such a person, as a singular means to gain him to virtue and sobriety. The very same thing we may say of the use of the sacrament of the Lord's-supper. It may, and often doth, prove a happy expedient, thro' the mercy of God, to make those good that were not so before.

I speak not this to encourage any vicious, evil liver, to approach to this ordinance, if he thinks of continuing in his sins. No, very unfit it is, that that holy bread should be given to such unclean creatures. But this is what I would say, Let none, upon account of their forepast lives be discouraged from doing their duty

to God in this ordinance: on the contrary, if they can be truly ſorry for their ſins, and heartily reſolve, with the grace of God, to forſake them; let them come with chearfulneſs to the Lord's table, not doubting but God will kindly receive them, and will give them ſuch grace and ſtrength; and if they will make uſe of it, they ſhall not fail of being true converts to holineſs and piety.

2. It is ſaid, in the ſecond place, That the ſin of unworthy receiving is ſo great, and the puniſhment threatened to it ſo grievous, that it ſeems ſafer not to receive at all, than to run ſuch a deſperate hazard. This is another conſideration that frights many from the ſacrament, though otherwiſe well-diſpoſed perſons. That paſſage of St. Paul is always running in their minds, 1 Cor. xi. 29. *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himſelf.* This is the text that frights them. But now as to this, I pray let it be conſidered:

In the firſt place, Thoſe among us that are ſo fearful of coming to the ſacrament, are in no danger at all of receiving unworthily, in the ſenſe that St. Paul uſeth this term: for the unworthy receiving that he ſo ſeverely cenſures in the Corinthians, was their approaching to the Lord's table with ſo little a ſenſe of what they were about, that, as he here expreſſeth it, *they did not diſcern the Lord's body:* that is to ſay, they made no diſtinction between the bread of the ſacrament, and common food. Things were then at that paſs among the Corinthians, that when they met together to receive the ſacrament (which, in thoſe days, was uſually uſhered in by a common feaſt of rich and poor together) they uſed the church more like an eating or tippling houſe, than the houſe of God. This

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you may see in the 20th verse of that chapter: *When*, saith he, *ye come together into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper: for in eating, every one takes before other his own supper, and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What, have ye not houses to eat and drink in, or despise ye the church of God? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.* Thus far St. Paul, in that place. Now sure, such an unworthy, irreverent, profane carriage as this, at the receiving the holy sacrament, might justly deserve that severe censure that he there passeth upon it: *He that eateth and drinketh* thus *unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, because he discerneth not the Lord's body.* But, I hope, there is none of those among us that are so very scrupulous about coming to the sacrament, can be in any danger of profaning it after this manner.

But, secondly, The damnation which St. Paul here denounceth, is not, perhaps, so frightful as is commonly apprehended: for all that he saith, if the original be consulted, will appear to be no more than this, He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself; meaning hereby, that he who doth thus affront our Lord's institution, by making no distinction between the bread of the sacrament and common food, doth by this his profaneness, draw down severe judgments from God upon his own head: *For, for this cause* (saith he in the next words) *many are weak and sickly among you, and many are fallen asleep.* But here is not a word of everlasting damnation, much less of any man's being concluded in that state, by receiving unworthily; unless one will say, that all those who are visited by God's judgments in this world, shall be damned in the next; which is so far from be-

ing true, that St. Paul, in this very place, affirms the contrary, namely, in ver. 32. where he tells us, That *when we are thus judged* (in this world) *we are chaſtened of the Lord, that we ſhould not be condemned with the world.*

But thirdly, Admitting St. Paul in theſe words to mean damnation in our uſual ſenſe, yet ſtill the utmoſt they can come to, will be no more than this, That whoſoever eateth and drinketh thus unworthily, as the Corinthians did, is guilty of a damnable ſin. But now there are a great many other caſes, beſides this of the ſacrament, in which a man is guilty of a damnable ſin, if he do not perform his duty as he ought to do. He that prays or hears unworthily, or in any inſtance performs the worſhip of God, or profeſſeth the chriſtian religion unworthily: I ſay, ſuch a man, according to the proteſtant doctrine, may be ſaid to do theſe things to his own damnation, upon the ſame account that he is ſaid to eat and drink his own damnation, that communicates unworthily in the ſacrament, tho' perhaps not in ſo high a degree: that is to ſay, ſuch a man is guilty of a ſin that is in its own nature damnable, and may prove ſo to him, unleſs, either by a particular or general repentance, he obtains God's pardon for it: but yet, for all this, there is no man will, for theſe reaſons, think it adviſable to leave off the practice of theſe duties: but the only conſequence he will draw from hence is, that he is ſo much the more concerned to take care that he perform them as he ought to do.

But, fourthly and laſtly, to conclude, Let the ſin of coming to the ſacrament unworthily, be as great and as damnable as we can reaſonably ſuppoſe it, yet this is that we contend for, the ſin of totally withdrawing from it, is greater and more damnable: ſo that if he

who partakes of it unworthily, doth eat and drink damnation to himself; he that partakes not at all, is so far from mending the matter, that he doth increase that damnation. The truth of this assertion depends upon that known rule of casuistical divinity, That it is a greater sin to omit a known duty altogether, than to perform that duty as well as we can, though with much unworthiness.

But I dare hold you no longer upon this argument; I would only say this, and I have done: Though I am far from encouraging any to approach the Lord's table without due qualifications; or from extenuating any man's sin that comes unworthily (unworthily, I mean in the scripture sense of the word, and not as it is understood by some people among us); yet this I say, that if men did seriously consider what a sin it is to live without the sacrament, it being an apparent neglect, and looking like a contempt of our Saviour's institution, and a renouncing the worship of God, and the communion of the church, in the great instance of christian worship and christian communion; and withal, what terrible consequences they bring upon themselves thereby, even the depriving themselves of the chief of those ordinary means which our Lord hath appointed for the obtaining remission of sins, and the grace and influences of the Holy Spirit: I say, if men did seriously consider these things, they would not look upon it as so slight a matter, voluntarily to excommunicate themselves from the society of the faithful, as to the partaking in this great duty and privilege of christians; but what apprehensions soever they had of the sin and danger of receiving unworthily, they would, for all that, think it more sinful and more dangerous not to receive at all.

I pray God give us all grace, ſeriouſly to conſider theſe things, and ſo enlighten our minds, and diſpoſe our wills by his Holy Spirit, that laying aſide all prejudices, and ſloth, and carnal affections, we may ſincerely apply ourſelves to ſerve God conſtantly and diligently in this, and all the other inſtances that he hath commanded us, to the glory of his bleſſed name, and to our own great comfort, and increaſe in piety and virtue. This God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

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# SERMON VII.

## The design of Christianity.

1 JOHN iii. 8.

——*For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*

WHAT is here meant by the *works of the devil*, is plain from the former part of the verse, *He that committeth sin*, saith the apostle, *is of the devil; for the devil sinned from the beginning:* and then it follows, *for this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.* So that the works of the devil are all manner of sin and wickedness; and consequently the destroying the works of the devil must mean, the destroying out of mankind all sin and wickedness, and, in the place thereof, planting in them all manner of virtue and holiness. And this the apostle here affirms to be the great end of Christ's coming into the world.

It is the same account of Christ's undertaking, in other words, that St. Paul gives us in the second to Ti-

tus; Christ therefore *gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.* And the same account likewise that St. Peter gives of it in the third of the Acts, *Unto you first*, saith he, *God having raised up his Son Jesus* (that great prophet, whom God, by Moses, promised to raise up to his people) *hath sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.* Lastly, It is the same account that Zacharias gives us of the design of our Lord's coming into the world, in the first of St. Luke, namely, *That we being delivered from the hands of our* [spiritual] *enemies, might serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.*

It were to be wished, that this was more considered and laid to heart by all of us that profess to be Christ's disciples. If it was, it would be impossible for many of us to lead such lives as we do, without the utmost confusion, and the continual reproaches of our own consciences. But whilst other sorts of accounts have been taken up concerning Christ's undertaking, and the design of his religion, so different from that which my text, and the other passages I have quoted, do give of it; whilst men have represented our Saviour to themselves, as one that was sent rather to free them from the punishment of their sins, than from the power and dominion of them; as one that came not so much to make them really righteous in their own persons, as to impute his own righteousness to them; and to fulfil the law of God for them, rather than to oblige them to a more strict obedience to it: whilst they have been willing to look upon his gospel, not as a practical institution to teach us, and oblige us to live well, or as the means appointed by God for the reforming the manners

of mankind, but only as a system of propositions to be believed and professed, together with some few outward precepts to be practised by us, in order to the distinguishing us from the rest of the world: whilst, I say, we have entertained such notions as these concerning the religion of our Lord Jesus Christ; it is no wonder that it hath no greater effect upon mens lives, than we see it has at this day; but is become a barren, evanid, ineffectual thing, a matter of words and dispute, a mere piece of book-learning, a name to distinguish parties by, and little more.

Give me leave therefore, at this time, and on this day, on which we are met to commemorate the Son of God's being manifested in the flesh, to discourse to you of the great end and design of this his manifestation, as it is here declared to us by his apostle. This, I am sure, as it is a proper argument for the season; so, if it be well considered, it will effectually keep us from placing our christianity in such things as we see men commonly do; and will oblige us, above all things, to a serious and hearty endeavour after universal virtue and sanctity; it being certain, that the planting of this in us, and the destroying out of us all sin and wickedness, which are the proper works of the devil, was the great end of Christ's coming into the world, and of the religion which he set on foot among men.

This is the point therefore, that I shall endeavour to make out at this time. And in order to the so doing, it will be sufficient to shew these two things:

First, That this was an end and design most worthy of the Son of God, to propose to himself in his undertakings for mankind. And secondly, That the history of our Lord, and the religion he instituted, do all along, through-

throughout the whole structure and contrivance of them, visibly express such a design.

I. I begin with the first, That to deliver men from the bondage of their sins, and to restore their natures to a state of virtue and holiness, was a design most worthy of the Son of God to propose to himself in his undertakings for mankind. Now the truth of this will appear, if we either consider how necessary, how essential an ingredient holiness is to the happiness of mankind; or, on the other side, how impossible it is in the nature of the thing, for any man to be happy that is under the power and dominion of sin: for from hence it will be evident, that if our Saviour's errand into the world was to serve the interests of mankind, he could propose no design to himself more glorious, more worthy of the Son of God, than this that we are speaking of.

And first, Let us see how much a holy divine frame of soul contributes to our happiness. I pray what doth the chief happiness of any being consist in; but in these two things? In having its nature advanced to the greatest perfection it is capable of; and secondly, in being put into the possession of the greatest good it can enjoy. Let us now apply this to mankind. And first, I ask, what is the highest excellence and perfection that human nature is capable of? Is it not to be made as like unto God as is possible? There is no doubt of it. The measure of all created excellency and perfection, can be nothing else but the Divine Nature, which is perfection itself; and therefore the nearest approach that any nature can make to that, is a state of the utmost perfection that that nature can arrive to: but now there is nothing in the world, by which we can approach nearer unto God, nothing that can give us a greater resemblance

semblance of his nature, than those moral accomplishments of the mind we are speaking of; that is to say, universal purity, and righteousness, and goodness. For, as on the one hand, these are the things that constitute the very being of the divine life, and are (if one may so speak) the top, the flower of all the perfections that are in God's nature; so, on the other hand, these are the only qualities, in which it is possible for mankind to imitate him. Our natures will not admit that we should be infinite, independent, omnipotent, and omniscient, as God is; but we may be, nay, we are commanded to be, holy, as God is holy, merciful, as God is merciful, and perfect in the inward goodness and rectitude of our mind, as our heavenly Father is perfect. That is the first thing.

And then, secondly, As for the being put into the possession of the greatest good we are capable of, which is the other part of the chief happiness, and without which, indeed, all excellency of nature would not signify very much; forasmuch as no creature, how excellent soever, is self-sufficient: as for this, I say, I ask again, whether there can be a greater good than God? If not, then, whether he that is put in a condition of enjoying God, be not put into the possession of the greatest good he is capable of? It certainly must be granted. But now, I say, it is true holiness and goodness only, that can put mankind into a capacity of enjoying God; nay, not only so, but doth put those that are endowed with it, into an actual enjoyment of him. [In some degree during this life, but in fulness and perfection hereafter.] For pray, wherein consists the enjoyment of God? Doth it not consist in loving him with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and rejoicing in the sense of his love to us; in being inwardly and powerfully

fully affected with his presence, with his goodness, with all his excellencies; and, in a word, in having one mind and one will with him? But what is all this, but either the very essence, or the proper and natural exercise of that holiness and goodness we are now discoursing of? As therefore before, we saw that true holiness makes us like unto God; so by what has been now said, we see that it inseparably unites us to him; and thereby makes that inexhausted fountain of all good to be as much ours, as our capacities will admit of. And still the more holy, the more pure, the more devout we grow, still we shall more and more enjoy God, and so for ever and ever.

There needs no more to be said for the shewing how necessary, how essential true goodness is to the happiness of mankind. I do not here say that this alone will make a man completely happy: for human nature being made up of soul and body, there must be a great many other things taken care of, besides the holiness and purity of the mind, in order to the rendering that compound, which we call man, entirely happy. And the providing for these likewise, was one part of our Saviour's business in the world. But seeing the main things required to our happiness, are those we have been speaking of, it was necessary that he should, in the first place, provide for them. And therefore with good reason do we say, that there was the first and great design of his coming, namely, to restore the image of God in fallen mankind.

But for the farther clearing of this truth, let us, in the second place, turn our thoughts to the state of mankind, as they are under the power and dominion of sin; and see whether so long as they continue in that state, it be not impossible for them to be happy, though

though there was no other punishment to be dreaded from their sins, but only such as ariseth from the sins themselves.

Sin is an infinite imperfection, and therefore an infinite evil. It is the worst corruption, and the greatest debasement of human nature that is possible, and the fartheſt recession in the world from the divine perfections, from their approach to which all other perfections have their name and estimate.

It is truly θηριώδες τι πάθος Ἀθεότης, as one of the philosophers calls it, a perfect lapse into brutality, a state of flat contradiction to God.

It is evil pure and unmixt: no circumstance in the world can make it in any sense good, whereas all other evils so reputed, may be so circumstantiated, as to have some mixture of goodness or commendableness in them.

It is that which puts mankind into an utter incapacity of ever enjoying the supreme good, which no other evil can do. For it is not more impossible (as the apostle expresses it) for *light to have communion with darkness*, than for *God to have fellowship with Belial*. For though we should suppose a wicked person, a whoremonger for instance, a worldling, a malicious, prophane, or irreligious person, to have all his sins forgiven him; and not only so, but to be compassed about, and (as I may say) gilded over with all those external glories, in which we do believe good men shall shine in the life to come; nay, and farther, to have an excellent understanding given to him, so as that he was able to reach the height of seraphims in his sublime contemplations: yet so long as that wicked nature remains in him, he would not, for all this, be a whit nearer to the enjoying of God; forasmuch as there can be no enjoyment, where there is no love, no likeness of nature

tnre, no union of mind. Nay, I know not whether these circumstances we have placed him in (supposing such circumstances compatible to such a man) would not make him more miserable than otherwise he would be. For the excellency of his understanding, and those external glories, would not suffer him to doubt, but that the greatest good was to be had in God: yet thro' the perverseness of his nature he would find, that this good would be so far from being a good to him, that it would be the greatest of evils: forasmuch as there was the most infinite unsuitableness and disagreement between the object presented to him, and his faculties, that were to be exercised about it.

What shall I say more? As goodness is health, so sin is sickness and death. The worst abuse of our highest faculties, a state of violence to nature. 'Tis all that we call unreasonableness, confusion, deformity, monstrosity. In a word, it is the greatest of all evils, as being at the greatest distance from the greatest good.

So that, these things considered, we may reasonably conclude, that if Christ had any design to make us happy; nay, if he had any design to make us not miserable; it was necessary for him to redeem us from the slavery of sin, and to restore our natures to their primitive rectitude, by making us virtuous and good.

How inconsiderate then, how unreasonable are those men, that would make the ultimate end of our Saviour's undertaking, to be the freeing men from the punishment of their sin, and the entitling them to eternal happiness, without any respect had to the change and renewing of their natures. For, in the first place, from what has been said, it is easy to see, how very much they do hereby disparage the love and kindness of our Saviour, and lessen his undertaking. For whilst they

make

make him only to have redeemed us from his Father's wrath, and the punishments consequent thereupon, leaving us, in the mean time, to the impurity and corruption of our natures, which of itself, without the accession of any external evil, is a misery great enough; they do but make him half a Saviour: one that freed us indeed from some outward evils, but left us irremediably exposed to many inward ones as great, or greater, than the other. One that delivered us from the apprehensions of a gibbet or an executioner, but could not, or would not cure us of the intolerable fevers and other distempers, under which we fatally languished.

Secondly, It is easy to see likewise, how absurd a notion these men have of happiness. For whilst they make a man under the power and dominion of sin capable of the happiness of the other world, which chiefly consists in the fruition of God's excellencies and perfections, they do in effect affirm, that a man may be made happy by that, of which he hath no sense, no perception at all; or rather, to speak properly, by that, to which he hath the greatest aversion and antipathy. But in true speaking, heaven to such a man (I am sure that, heaven that is promised in the scripture) would be so far from being a place of happiness, that, bating the corporeal pains, it would, in all respects, be hell itself.

Nor will it here help the matter, to say, that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to all believers; and that by virtue thereof, they are to all intents and purposes made righteous, even as much as if they were righteous in their own persons: I say, this will not help the matter. For so long as sin and wickedness are not mere names, but real things, and have their immutable properties; let Christ's righteousness be never so much imputed to us, yet so long as they remain in us, they will

will be evils, they will make us miserable, they will put an eternal bar to our enjoyment of God. And we can no more hope to remedy this, by the imputation of another's righteousness, than a blind man can hope to see by the eyes of another; than a man in the fit of the stone or gout, can hope to find ease by the ease of his physician; than a crooked deformed person can hope to be made strait and beautiful by the comeliness of his friend.

II. But to come to our second head of discourse. As the destroying the works of the devil from among men, and the making them sincerely righteous, and holy, and good, was a design most worthy of the Son of God to undertake: so, in the second place, his whole transactions upon earth, and the religion he set on foot in the world, were so contrived in every part of them, as to be a manifest pursuance of this design.

This is the second thing I am to speak to; and for the making it good, there needs no more to be done, than only to desire any man to cast his eyes, either on the precepts which our Lord delivered; or on the doctrines he taught; or on the life he led; or on the death he suffered; or lastly, on what he hath been doing for men at the right hand of God ever since: all which taken together, do make up the entire history of our Saviour, and the whole scheme of his institution. If now it do appear, that the natural tendency of every one of these was to make men good; and that that was the end they all aimed at, then I hope our proposition is sufficiently proved.

To go over all these particulars at this time, would prove too great an exercise of your patience, which I would not willingly injure; and therefore I shall confine

fine myself to the three first of them, and those too I shall treat of very briefly and generally.

And first of all, that this was the design of all our Saviour's precepts, and the law that he gave us, is evident beyond contradiction. There is not one of them, which is not either an injunction of some moral virtue, or a prohibition of some vice, or a recommendation of the means, by which some virtue is to be acquired, or some sin to be mortified.

Whatever other liberties the gospel may have indulged unto men, it is certain it grants none to their vices. Never was virtue taught in such perfection, or exacted with such severity, as we there find it. Never did any man set the duties of human life, in all its relations, towards God, towards our neighbours, and towards ourselves, at so high a pitch, as our Saviour hath there set them. All the gentile world cannot shew us, out of all their great masters of morality, their most refined philosophers, such a collection of sublime and accurate precepts of living, as are delivered in one single sermon of our Saviour's; that, I mean, upon the mount.

So far is he from giving countenance to any sort of wickedness or impurity in the practices of mankind, that he hath forbid all the tendencies and approaches to it in the very thoughts; having put restraints upon the most secret and undiscernible workings of our minds towards every thing that is evil. To look upon a woman to lust after her, is, in his account, to commit adultery. To be rashly and uncharitably angry, is forbid by him as a degree of murder. Not to forgive an injury, is by his law a sin, as well as to do one.

I own that there is the greatest encouragement given by our Saviour, to all repenting sinners, that is possible; nay,

nay, though they have been the greatest of sinners. But then he requires both a thorough change of their minds, and a thorough reformation of their manners too, before they must hope for any benefit from him.

I own likewise, that there is in the gospel all the allowance made for the natural unavoidable frailties and weaknesses of mankind, that can be desired. But then it supposes the persons, to whom the allowance is made, to be sincerely (tho' not perfectly) pure and upright, both in their minds and lives; that they harbour no iniquity in their hearts, nor practise any known sin in their conversation; nay, and that they do their best endeavours likewise to overcome their very infirmities.

In a word, it is the fundamental law of the gospel, that *without holiness no man shall see God*; and all the particular precepts we there meet with, do exactly answer this general one, and are a pursuance of it.

Nor, in the second place, is this design of making men virtuous more conspicuous in our Saviour's precepts, than in the doctrines he delivered to mankind. Those truths, (I mean) which he revealed from God to be believed by all those that should embrace his religion. There was none of them calculated for the gratification of mens idle curiosities, the busying and amusing them with airy and useless speculations. Much less were they intended for an excuse of our credulity, or a trial how far we could bring our reasons to submit to our faith. But as, on one hand, they were plain and simple, and such as by their agreeableness to the rational faculties of mankind, did highly recommend themselves to our belief; so, on the other hand, they had an immediate relation to practice; and were the genuine principles and foundations, upon which all human

man and divine virtues were naturally to be superstructed.

The doctrines which our Saviour delivered, will all of them fall under one of these three heads:

They were either in order to the clearing, improving, and confirming the great truths of natural religion, without which a virtuous, holy life could not be led;

Or they were in order to the removing of those erroneous wicked principles out of the minds of men, that then commonly prevailed in the world, and were great hindrances and obstructions of true virtue and piety;

Or, lastly, They were such as contained new arguments, new encouragements, new engagements to put us upon the practice of holiness, that mankind never thought of before. And of this last sort were those doctrines which we call the peculiar articles of the christian faith; as namely, the infinite love of God to mankind, expressed in sending his own Son for their redemption: that Son of God's offering up of himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, and thereby sealing a covenant of pardon and reconciliation to all true penitents that believe in him: that Son of God's being afterwards raised from the dead, and carried up into heaven, to appear there as a perpetual advocate and intercessor for us at the right hand of God; and at the same time sending down his Holy Spirit, as his vicegerent upon earth, to maintain and promote his cause and religion in the world; and, by his inward influences, to assist all Christ's faithful disciples in their endeavours after virtue: and lastly, that Son of God's coming down again from heaven at the end of the world, to judge both the quick and the dead, according to their works done in the flesh; and to reward all good men with

with eternal life and happiness, and to punish all bad men in hell-fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.

This now is the sum of those doctrines that were delivered by our Saviour: and as to all, and every one of them, I ask, whether they be not truly practical doctrines? Whether the whole scope and design of them be not to make men good? Nay, lastly, Whether in these doctrines there be not a more powerful, a more effectual method laid down for the reforming human nature, and obliging the whole world to forsake their sins, and to lead holy and virtuous lives, than was ever taught before, nay, or than was possible to have been contrived by all the wit of mankind.

By what I have now said, it plainly appears, how groundless the pretence of those men is, who would explode the doctrine of the blessed Trinity out of the christian religion, as being a mere metaphysical speculation, and nothing at all tending to the promoting of piety and virtue among men. For as that doctrine is delivered by our Saviour, it is certainly so far from being a matter of mere speculation, that it is the great foundation of, and the greatest engagement to, a virtuous holy life, that was possible to be given. We own it is a mystery, and a great one, but not an useless speculative mystery, but a mystery of godliness, as the apostle stiles it. God Almighty did not reveal that mystery to us as a piece of philosophy, for the filling our heads with new sublime notions about his nature, but as a principle, or hypothesis, absolutely necessary for the right understanding the structure and contrivance of the gospel dispensation; wherein, discovering in how wonderful a manner, each person in the divine essence, was severally engaged in the great affair of bringing men into repentance, we might, in the first place, have abun-

abundant reason to embrace and adhere to that religion, in which alone, of all the religions in the world, was a method discovered of reconciling men to God, without injury to any of the divine attributes, or violence done to the liberty of man's will: And secondly, might have the strongest engagements imaginable, seriously to set ourselves upon the great work of the reformation of our lives; for the effecting of which, both Father, Son, and Holy Ghost had so zealously, and with such astonishing condescension, concerned themselves.

When we therefore consider the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, as an article of the christian faith, we are not barely to consider it, as it denotes, or expresses, three eternal, divine persons, subsisting in one divine nature; much less are we to trouble our heads with the manner of the emanation of one person from another, and other such things (with their curious enquiries into, and definitions about which, some, it is to be feared, instead of clearing, have rather obscured and perplexed that sacred mystery) but we are to consider this mystery, as the holy scripture proposeth it, namely, every person as conversant about, and co-operating in the work of our redemption: God the Father, as having an infinite compassion and kindness for lost mankind, and thereupon sending his Son to restore them: God the Son, as taking human nature upon him, that by his life he might both instruct us in God's will, and be to us an example of living; and, by his death, he might make a propitiation for our sins: and lastly, God the Holy Ghost, as sent into the hearts of all believers, to be a new principle in them of a divine life; to assist all well-disposed persons with his grace, to the end of the world, in the subduing their corruptions, and in the performance of all that obedience which Christ had required

quired of them. And certainly, the doctrine of the Trinity, thus believed, thus considered, is a foundation of piety, with a witness: a doctrine that carries in it the strongest arguments that can possibly be made use of to a reasonable nature, to oblige us to give up ourselves entirely to the service of God.

But, in the third place, pass we from the doctrines our Saviour taught, to the life he lived in the world; which will afford us another undeniable proof of the point we are upon: for whoever considers the particulars of that life, as it is recorded in the gospels, cannot but be convinced, that it was wholly framed to the purposes of teaching universal virtue to mankind, by giving us a most lively, and yet a most imitable example of all the branches of it.

The life that our blessed Lord led upon earth, was full of innocence and simplicity, free from all manner of guile, and from the least suspicion of vice, or any thing that looked like it. There was nothing in his temper, or in his conversation, that savoured of fourness, or churlishness; of vain-glory, or ambition, or self-seeking; of the love of pleasure, or of the love of the world. On the contrary, he was the reverse of all these; being the modestest, the humblest, the best natured, the most self-denying, and disinterested man that ever appeared in the world. He had no views in any of his actions, but the pure glory of God, and the good of mankind. He was dead to the world while he lived in it; very well pleased and contented with his low condition; extremely devout towards God, and conversing much with him by prayer and meditation, and yet making that no pretence of neglecting the business of his calling. He bore injuries and affronts with the greatest meekness, though he was a person of the

highest quality in the world. Patient he was to admiration under unheard-of sufferings, and not only really to forgive his enemies, but to oblige them all the ways they were capable.

It would be endless to pursue all the instances of that glorious virtue, in which our Saviour shined forth as *a light to the paths, and a lantern to the feet* of all the ages and generations of the world. I shall therefore here only desire leave to take notice, how exquisitely the circumstances of our Saviour's life were contrived, for the rendering him every way a compleat and proper example of virtue to the sons of men. And there are two particulars especially that make hither:

First, His chusing the life of a private ordinary person. Had he appeared in the quality, and with the equipage of a prince, or some such illustrious personage (as indeed the Jews expected such a one for their Messias) and framed his manners and conversation according to that character; the virtues and graces he must then have chiefly exercised, would not have been imitable by much the greater part of mankind; as who, being placed in a quite different sphere, must also have different patterns and precedents to frame their lives by; and consequently, the benefit of his example would have redounded, comparatively, but to a few. Besides, that state of life would not have led him to opportunities of exemplifying several virtues, which the generality of mankind have the most frequent occasions for; and for the obtaining of which, by reason of their extreme difficulty, they most stand in need of the guidance and encouragement of an example. Such, for instance, are, contentedness in a mean fortune, a continual dependance on God's providence; patient suffering of injuries and persecutions, with several of the

like nature. But now our Saviour appearing as he did, in lowly and common circumstances, in that rank and quality, into which the lot of the greatest part of men is cast; and therein continually conflicting with all those difficulties and temptations, to which the condition of human life is most exposed; he rendered himself hereby an example of the most universal influence, such a copy of virtue, as the necessities of mankind did most require should be given them to write after.

Again, secondly, what I have observed as to the outward condition of our Saviour's life, the same, and to the same purposes, I observe of his virtues. They were indeed perfect in the highest degree; but yet the instances of them were very ordinary and very familiar, complying with human society, and proportioned to the strength and capacities of all men. There was nothing of prodigy in his conversation: nothing that by its greatness and too much lustre, might rather dazzle our eyes than guide us; rather scare our endeavours than encourage them. And herein differs the story of our Lord from that of several of his followers and disciples in after-times: whose lives, as they are related to us, are rather fit to fright and amaze us, to ensnare and create scruples in us, than to conduct us in the ways of an even and regular piety. But our Saviour's life was nothing so. We do not find him forward in those prodigious mortifications, those long and tedious abstractions of spirit, those strange instances of uncommanded charity, with which the legends of the saints are stuffed: but in all the actions, in which he did propose himself imitable by us, he did so converse with men, that men might with ease and pleasure, and without the least prejudice to their secular affairs, converse in the world after his example. In a word, his whole

life

ife was perfectly framed to a conformity with his doc-
rine, and articles of faith. As these were fitted to e-
very man's understanding, so was that fitted for every
one's imitation.

Nay, let me add this farther, his very miracles and
imitable actions were also framed, as much as was
ossible, for the carrying on this design: for they were
ll of such a quality, that they did not only evidence
he divine authority of his religion to mens understand-
ngs, which was one great end of them, but did also
owerfully recommend goodness and charity to their
ractices. We might in them, at the same time, dis-
over both the truth of christianity, and the spirit and
emper of it: for, it is observable of all the great and
onderful works that our Saviour wrought, that they
ere not mere signs and prodigies, such as the carnal
ews hanker'd after, but actions of beneficence to man-
ind; illustrious expressions of the most large and dif-
usive charity. He never exerted that divine power
hat was in him, but to the ends of benefiting some
erson or other. His constant course of miracles was
ut a continual going about doing good.

And herein remarkably appears the difference be-
ween our Saviour's miracles, and those of Moses and
lias; the one the author, the other the great restorer
f the Jewish law. Theirs were for the most part
indicative and destructive; dreadful plagues and judg-
ents upon gain-sayers; waters from the deep to
rown them, and fire from heaven to consume them;
nd this, suitably enough to the nature and genius of
hat dispensation, to which they did hereby gain autho-
ty. But our Saviour, who came to infuse another
ind of spirit into mankind, chose to confirm his reli-
ion by miracles of mercy; by healing the sick, feed-

ing the hungry, opening the eyes of the blind, casting out devils, and raising dead people to life again: plainly hereby making us to understand, that the great business of his religion was, to make men kind and good-natured; and to produce in them all the fruits of an useful and charitable conversation; and this in a degree far higher than either the law of Moses, or any other religion in the world did oblige men to.

And thus much for our Saviour's life and example, which was the third head I was to speak to: as for the two remaining parts of his history, which I mentioned as farther proofs of the point we are upon, I shall not now meddle with them, having (I fear) been too tedious already; and therefore I only beg leave to draw two short inferences from what hath been said, and I shall conclude.

And first, if this account we have given of the ends of Christ's manifestation in the flesh be a true one; then we may learn what judgment we are to make of all such doctrines and opinions, as do either directly teach vice, and profaneness, and careless living, or by necessary consequence open a door to it: of all such doctrines as dispose a man to believe, either that holiness of life is not necessary to salvation, or at least not so necessary, but that there may be ways found out to supply the want of it: of all such doctrines as do check and discourage mens endeavours after universal virtue, either by representing it unto them, as a thing unattainable in this life; or by filling their minds with hard, and unworthy, and penurious thoughts of God and his goodness: of all such doctrines as tend to extinguish the inward life and spirit of religion, by turning it into customariness, or formality, or superstition: in a word, of all those doctrines that do any way hinder

der or obstruct good life. For it is certain we may affirm of all such, that they are not of God; that Christ never taught them; that the holy scripture, in the true sense of it, cannot possibly own them, as being directly contradictory to the great design and intendment of it, which, as we have seen, is to plant in men all manner of virtue and holy conversation.

This is an excellent rule to examine the truth of religious opinions by, and may be of great use for the guiding our judgments as to many points, which are with great eagerness disputed among christians at this day: and I mention it, not without a particular reflection upon many of the doctrines taught in the church of Rome; and upon some likewise, that are too much propagated among ourselves (though, God be thanked, never owned by our church) both of which sorts, if they be brought to this test, will appear manifestly false and unchristian; as being either apparently contrived to serve a secular turn; or, if not that, yet all of them, directly, or by necessary consequence, encouraging men in a careless or a vicious life.

But, secondly, since the end and design of our Lord's coming into the world is such as hath been said; then, in the name of God, *let every one that names the name of Christ depart from all iniquity.* This is the most natural inference that can be drawn from this doctrine.

All of us here present do call ourselves christians; nay, and I believe, would take it ill of any one that should think otherwise of us. For God's sake then, let us make it appear that we are so, by living up to the design of our christianity. Let us shew that we are indeed the disciples of Christ, by walking as we have him for an example: let us make all the world see, that

we believe his doctrines, by conforming ourselves to his precepts: that we fear his threatenings, by flying every thing that is base and sinful: that we expect his rewards in the other world, by living above the vanities of this: let our constant and vigorous pursuit of every thing that is good, of every thing that is just, of every thing that is lovely, that is venerable, that is of good report, bear witness for us, to what master, and to what religion we do belong.

There is no other way but this to evidence, that we are indeed what we pretend to be. It is not sufficient to entitle us to the name of Christians, that we were baptized into Christ, that we profess his faith, that we rest upon him for salvation, that we are members of an orthodox church: no; what St. Paul said of circumcision, the same may be said of baptism, and all those other things (I use the words of a late eminent divine of our church) "They "do verily profit, if we keep the law of Christ; but if "we be transgressors of that law, our baptism is no "baptism, our faith is mere infidelity, our christianity "is no better than heathenism." Nay, further, I will be bold to say, there is not a Turk or a heathen, but, if he live better than we, if he be more innocent, more chaste, more humble, more just, more charitable than we, he is, to all intents and purposes, a better christian; forasmuch as he lives more up to the ends of Christ's religion. And a thousand times rather would I chuse to appear at the last day, before the great tribunal of God, in the person of such a poor infidel, than in the condition of the most orthodox christian, if he soil and unhallow his profession by a vicious life. God Almighty touch all our hearts with a sense of these things, and grant, that that grace of his, which, as on this

this day, hath appeared unto men, may effectually teach every one of us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, and soberly, and godly in this present world, looking for the blessed hope, and the second and more glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour. To whom, &c.

# SERMON VIII.

## CHRIST's Reſurrection ſufficiently proved by choſen Witneſſes.

ACTS x. 40, 41.

*Him God raiſed up the third day, and ſhewed him openly;*

*Not to all the people, but unto witneſſes, choſen before of God; even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he roſe from the dead.*

THE ſolemnity of this day leading me to treat of ſomething relating to our Lord's reſurrection from the dead, I ſhall beg leave at this time to give an account of one circumſtance of it, which is not commonly inſiſted on in the diſcourſes upon this argument; but which yet is looked upon by ſome (who are glad of any ſort of weapons, tho' never ſo ſlight ones, wherewith they may attack the chriſtian religion) to contain a ſtrong objection againſt the ſufficiency of the proof we have of that great article of our faith. It is that which is here told us by St. Peter, in the words I have now read unto

unto you; namely, That when *God raised up our Lord Jesus on the third day, and shewed him to be alive, he did not shew him to all the people, but only to chosen witnesses appointed by God for that purpose.*

It is certain, that Christ's resurrection is the great fundamental article of christianity. Our whole religion stands or falls with it. *If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain*, as St. Paul tells us. And therefore this point, above all others, ought to have such a proof and attestation, as is clear, and full, and convincing, and liable to no exception or evasion; forasmuch as whatever shakes the credit of this, shakes the credit of our whole religion.

Now, we christians do say, and we have the greatest reason in the world to say it, That we have as good proof of Christ's resurrection as any man can reasonably desire. We have such an attestation of it, as none can justly except against: for we have the constant agreeing testimony of several credible witnesses, to whom our Saviour shewed himself alive after his crucifixion, and with whom he did eat and drink for several days together, and in whose presence he did visibly ascend up into heaven. And we have that testimony authenticly conveyed down to us; and confirmed likewise with all the sorts of evidence that any matter of fact, done at the same distance of time from us that this was, is capable of.

Well, but to this it is objected, that these witnesses we speak of, were all of them Christ's friends, and followers, and dependents. There are no witnesses produced of his resurrection, but such as were his own disciples, such as had espoused his interest, and were of his party, and consequently were bound, right or wrong, to keep up his reputation in the world. If

Christ did indeed rise from the dead, and meant to give sufficient unsuspected evidence to mankind of that his resurrection, it was fit that he should have appeared after his death to men of all sorts, to his enemies, as well as to his friends; to those that did not believe his religion, as well as to those that did. But yet we find that he shewed himself only to his own followers, and conversed with none but them, not at all with the unbelieving Jews or Romans: and this is owned by the apostles themselves. St. Peter, here in my text, when he preached Christ's resurrection to Cornelius, confessing and declaring, that when God *raised up Jesus on the third day, and shewed him openly, yet it was not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before of God*, even his own apostles, *who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.*

This is, indeed, one of the strongest objections that is brought against the article of Christ's resurrection; and it is not a new one; for Celsus particularly, fifteen hundred years ago, urged it against the christians, as Origen acquaints us. My business, at this time, shall be to consider it, and to give a fair account of this matter. And here I have three or four particulars to lay before you, which, if they be well considered, will convince any reasonable man, that how plausibly soever this objection looks at the first sight, yet there is nothing in the world in it, but it is all mere cavil.

I. And first of all, let it be considered, that though it be true what St. Peter here tells us, that when God raised up our Lord from the dead, *he did not shew him to all the people:* yet it is not true which is supposed in the objection, that there were no other witnesses of Christ's resurrection, but only his own disciples: for the soldiers that were placed by the Jewish magistrates,

to

to guard the ſepulchre after they had ſealed it up, were witneſſes of the whole tranſaction, as St. Matthew informs us. It is not indeed ſaid, that they ſaw our Lord Jeſus after he was riſen; but they were ſenſible of the earthquake which preceded his reſurrection: and they ſaw the angel that came down from heaven, and rolled away the ſtone from the door of the ſepulchre, and thereupon were ſtruck with ſuch terror, that they became as dead men: and they ſaw likewiſe, that his body was miſſing in the grave, as appears by the account they gave of theſe things to their maſters; who thereupon bribed them with large ſums of money, to give out that ridiculous ſtory, that, whilſt they were aſleep, his diſciples came and ſtole away his body; as if it was credible, either that ſixty men that ſet to watch (for ſo many, they tell us, a Roman Cuſtodia conſiſted of) could all be aſleep at once; or, if they were, that they could give an account of what was done while they ſlept.

But pray what ſort of man was St. Paul when our Saviour firſt appeared to him (for he appeared to him oftener than once) in that aſtoniſhing manner that is ſet down in the ninth of the Acts, when he, and all his company were ſtruck to the ground by that glorious unſupportable light that ſurrounded them? Was he then one of Chriſt's followers or diſciples? So far from that, that *he breathed forth nothing but threatenings and ſlaughter againſt all that were of that way*, and was, at that very time, going to Damaſcus, with a commiſſion from the Jewiſh ſanhedrim, to bring bound to Jeruſalem, all, both men and women, that believed on our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. There were then other witneſſes of our Saviour's reſurrection, beſides his own diſciples. That is the firſt thing.

II.

II. But, secondly, though there had been no other witnesses of Christ's resurrection than his own followers, yet their testimony was, to all intents and purposes, sufficient to ascertain all reasonable men to the world's end, of the truth of the matter of fact; nor is there any possible objection against it; as will appear, if we consider either the number of the witnesses, or the manner of Christ's appearance to them, or the times of it, or the quality of the persons, or the no reason they had to abuse the world with such a report, if it had been false; or lastly, the other evidence, besides their own word, that they gave of the truth of it.

For their number: they were many, both men and women, even some hundreds, that our Saviour shewed himself alive to, after he had been put to death.

For the manner of shewing himself to them: it was the most convincing that could be. He did not appear to them one by one, but to multitudes of them together, even to *five hundred brethren at once*, as St. Paul tells us, 1 Cor. xv. of whom the greatest part were alive at the time when he wrote that epistle. Nor did he shew himself to his disciples, by only giving them a glimpse of him, or just appearing to them, and then vanishing; but he conversed with them; he eat and drank with them; he exposed himself to be felt and handled by them.

For the times: it was not once or twice, but frequently, for the space of forty days; at the end of which he led them out to the Mount of Olives, and there, in their presence, did he visibly ascend up into heaven.

For the quality of the witnesses, and the matter they gave testimony to: there was no possible suspicion, either of their being deceived themselves, or deceiving others.

others. The perſons were plain, ſimple, illiterate men, and the moſt unfit in the world for the carrying on ſuch an impoſture, if this had been one. The matter that they gave teſtimony to, was a plain matter of fact, obvious to all their ſenſes; and let them have had never ſo little wit, yet, if they had but honeſty, their teſtimony concerning it might be relied on. And, that they had honeſty, appears beyond all exception from this; that no promiſes or threatenings could work upon them to depart from their evidence; but notwithſtanding all the ſufferings they underwent upon account thereof, they continued conſtant to the death, in maintaining to all the world, that Jeſus was riſen from the dead.

That they had no inducement to be thus conſtant in their teſtimony, but the obligations that their own conſciences laid upon them, is abundantly plain: for what advantage in the world could they expect to themſelves from their perſiſting in ſuch a ſtory as this, if it had been an untruth? Why, nothing but hatred, and reproaches, and infamy, and perſecution, and loſs of goods, and of life itſelf: this was all the reward they were to hope for from the world.

And this conſideration alone, if it be well attended to, will quite take away the ground of the whole objection. The main force of the objection lies here; that the witneſſes of Chriſt's reſurrection were his friends, of his own party, and conſequently were bound to keep up his reputation among men, right or wrong; and therefore their ſingle teſtimony ought not to be relied on. Now, it muſt be confeſſed, this circumſtance would have occaſioned ſome ſuſpicion in other caſes, where it was apparent ſome worldly deſign was carried on; or where there was a proſpect of riches,

or power, or ſome other temporal advantage, to be attained by the ſucceſsful management of an intrigue: but there is nothing of this to be pretended in this caſe of Chriſt's witneſſes. If Chriſt did not riſe from the dead, they had a world of reaſons and inducements to have deſerted both him and his religion: but they had none to make ſuch a groſs lie for his ſake, how much ſoever they had been his friends before. Nay, ſo far from that, that, as I ſaid, it was againſt all their worldly intereſts to own his reſurrection, though they were never ſo much convinced that he did really riſe from the dead. As things then ſtood, nothing but a ſenſe of their duty could have put them upon it, how well ſoever he had deſerved of them. They muſt be very good friends, and very honeſt and ſincere men too, that will venture all they are worth in this world, and their lives to boot, for the ſake of their friend, even while he is alive; and though the cauſe they appear in, on his behalf, be never ſo juſt. But, is it credible; nay, is it poſſible to be conceived, that ſuch a number of men ſhould have had ſuch a kindneſs for a friend; a friend too that was dead, and from whom they could hope for nothing; nay, a friend too that had been moſt unfriendly to them, in having moſt groſly deluded them: I ſay, is it poſſible (as human nature is conſtituted) that ſo many men, for the ſake of ſuch a perſon, would forge ſo monſtrous a lye, as his riſing from the dead, and ſtand to it too; when they not only got nothing by the cheat, but expoſed themſelves thereby to all the miſeries that mankind can endure?

But, laſtly, The evidence of Chriſt's reſurrection did not ſo much depend upon the bare teſtimony of theſe witneſſes, as upon other proofs they gave of the truth of it: for thoſe men that preached Chriſt's re-

ſurrection, gave demonſtration of the truth of the matter of fact, by the works that they themſelves wrought.

For here was the caſe: Chriſt, when he departed from his apoſtles, to go up into heaven, told them, that he had appointed them to be his witneſſes, not only in Judea and Samaria, but to the uttermoſt parts of the earth: but they muſt not enter upon that office, till they had their credentials; and therefore he bids them ſtay at Jeruſalem till they were endued with power from on high. Ten days after this, the Holy Ghoſt deſcends upon them in a viſible manner, and that in a full aſſembly. Upon this they every one began to ſpeak in languages that they never had been taught, to the great amazement of vaſt numbers of people of ſeveral nations, who, upon the rumour of this, flocked thither. Then were they qualified to preach Chriſt's reſurrection. And they did ſo: and, to confirm the truth of it, they wrought all ſorts of miracles. They cured all diſeaſes: nay, they themſelves raiſed the dead to life again. Nay, not only this, but they communicated the ſame power of working miracles, to all thoſe they laid their hands upon. And all theſe mighty wonders they ſolemnly did avow, they performed by the power of Jeſus Chriſt, who was crucified at Jeruſalem, and who was now alive at the right-hand of God. What now was the effect of all this? why, wherever they came, they brought over multitudes, both of Jews and Gentiles, to the faith of Jeſus Chriſt. One of theſe witneſſes (St. Peter by name) by one ſermon converted three thouſand. By another ſermon he converted five thouſand. And within a very few years (leſs than forty) by the preaching of theſe witneſſes, and the mighty ſigns and wonders they wrought, was chriſtianity ſpread throughout the world; and continues ſo to this very day.

Now,

Now, can any reasonable man desire greater evidence for any matter of fact, than all these particulars I have mentioned will amount to, for the matter of fact of our Saviour's resurrection? nay, I add farther, was ever any other matter of fact in the world better attested than this is?

III. And if this evidence be sufficient, then all that remains in the objection will very easily be answered. For, in the third place, what is pretended, that Christ ought in reason to have given proof of his resurrection to all about him promiscuously, and not to have confined his appearance and conversation to a select number; is very unreasonable. For, was this way of proceeding necessary for the convincing the world of the truth of Christ's resurrection; or was it not necessary? If it was not necessary, why is it urged? If it was necessary; then that very thing which the objection would have Christ to have done; if he had done it, would not have been sufficient; but he must have done more. For, by the same reason or argument that any man can prove, that it was necessary for the ascertaining men of Christ's resurrection, that he should have appeared to all about him, to all in the city where he rose; by the same reason it may be proved, that it was necessary he should have appeared to all the Jews in the land of Canaan; nay, not only so, but to all the Roman empire: for otherwise they would have had the same cause of objecting against his resurrection, that is now brought; namely, that the thing was a plot of the Jewish nation, for the bringing in one of their own country to be worshipped as a God throughout the world. Nay farther, upon this principle, it would have been necessary for Christ to have shewed himself in person, not only to all that lived

lived at that time, but to all of the ſeveral ſucceeding ages, even to this day.

The argument therefore of the objection proves too much, and therefore it proves nothing at all. The plain deſign of it is, to take away the credit of all ſuch teſtimony as is given by a ſelect number of witneſſes. And if that be once admitted, then the conſequence will be this, That we can have no good evidence of the truth of matter of fact, but evidence of ſenſe. And though we have Chriſt and his apoſtles witneſſing to us, and a thouſand witneſſes more, with the rich man in the parable, *we will not be perſuaded, unleſs one riſe from the dead*, and appear to us.

IV. And therefore, fourthly, taking it for granted, that the witneſſes of Chriſt's reſurrection could not be ſuch a determinate number of men (for otherwiſe, he muſt have appeared to all mankind) the queſtion is, what kind of men Chriſt ſhould have choſen for this purpoſe, his friends, or his enemies? The objection ſaith, both; but we ſay there is no reaſon in the world for it. His enemies having ſo long been obſtinate in their unbelief, notwithſtanding all the arguments, and all the miracles he had given them for their conviction, had rendered themſelves utterly unworthy of ſuch a favour. Ay, but (it will be ſaid) Chriſt's appearance from the dead to them, would have convinced them of their error. Suppoſing that; yet ſtill it was not fit, that God ſhould convert them after that manner. According to the methods, in which he deals with mankind, faith and religion is to be a virtue, a thing of choice, and not the effect of uncontroulable demonſtration. If they had had ſufficient means for the enlightening their underſtanding before, and yet had rejected them, as they did, there was no reaſon

that

that they ſhould have new and greater means uſed with them; ſuch means, as the force of which they could not reſiſt. If this was reaſonable; then it is reaſonable, that every atheiſt, or unbeliever now among us, that is not perſuaded by the common ſtanding arguments of religion, ſhould expect a miracle for his converſion. But this kind of proceeding is to do a ſort of violence to mens natures, and to take away all the praiſe and all the reward of being religious.

But indeed it is not ſo certain, that thoſe men that had reſiſted all Chriſt's preaching and miracles, and had afterwards moſt inhumanly crucified him, would have been brought over to the belief of him, though he had appeared to them from the dead. On the contrary, thoſe that could impute his wonderful and divine works that he wrought in his life, to magic, and confederacy with the devil, in all reaſon would have given the ſame acount of this his appearance after he was dead. For ſome men are ſo far gone in vice and wickedneſs, that even a demonſtration, or one from the dead, will not bring them to a ſenſe of their errors.

Now, ſuppoſing this to be the caſe; I am ſure ſuch men as theſe were by no means fit to be put among the witneſſes choſen of God, to whom our Saviour ſhould ſhew himſelf alive after his death: becauſe ſuch witneſſes as theſe would have done his cauſe more hurt, than ever they would have done it good.

Since therefore, there was of neceſſity to be a ſet particular number of witneſſes for the atteſting our Saviour's reſurrection to the world, it was infinitely fit, for the gaining credit to their teſtimony, that great care ſhould be taken in the choice of them. And if ſo; who were fitter to be pitched upon for that employment, than thoſe that were all known, tried, honeſt men,

men, and who had attended upon our Lord during all the time of his public ministry, and so were perfectly well acquainted both with his life and his doctrine, as well as with the truth of his resurrection? And lastly, who would so firmly persist in their testimony, that they would not scruple to undergo any sufferings, nay, even death itself, for so good a cause. And such a choice as this our Lord did make; and such a choice, all men that consider things seriously, cannot but allow to be reasonable.

I cannot think of any thing that can be farther objected upon this argument, unless it be this: that tho' it was not fit our Saviour should vouchsafe that kindness to his enemies and crucifiers, as to appear to them; yet, at least, he ought to have chosen some other witnesses, besides his own disciples, of his resurrection; some persons that were indifferent, that were neither engaged for him, or against him.

Well, let this be admitted as a reasonable thing: but, in answer to it, I say, that, for any thing we know to the contrary, Christ did make such a choice of his witnesses: for of those five hundred brethren, that, St. Paul tells us, our Saviour appeared to at once, several of them might not be brethren, might not be christians before his appearance to them, but might be converted by that appearance: so that, at the time of that appearance, they might be indifferent to him and his religion, though they were not so afterward.

But whether it were so or no, it matters not: for it will be one and the same thing as to the event, and consequently the objection will be idle and frivolous. For let us put this question: Would we have had these indifferent, unconcerned persons, to whom we wish Christ had appeared after his resurrection, and appointed

ed them witneſſes of it; I ſay, Would we have had them, after this appearance, to continue in this indifferency and unconcernedneſs, or would we not? If we would, then we would have them to continue infidels and unbelievers, notwithſtanding Chriſt's reſurrection, which they were eye-witneſſes of. But upon this ſuppoſition, what ſervice were they like to do the chriſtian cauſe by their teſtimony? This ſort of perſons were like to prove rare preachers of the goſpel to others, who, though they owned Chriſt's reſurrection, yet did not believe his doctrines. But, on the other ſide, if we would have all theſe indifferent, unconcerned men, upon the evidence of ſenſe that they had of Chriſt's reſurrection to be convinced thereby, that he was a true prophet ſent from God, and upon that conviction to become his diſciples; then the whole objection we have been ſo long upon, vaniſheth into nothing: for the thing is admitted that we have been all this while contending for; namely, that every one that is qualified to be a witneſs of Chriſt's reſurrection, muſt be a convert to his religion; and none could do any ſervice to his cauſe, but thoſe that were ſuch. And certainly this is true: and the more you conſider it, the more you will be convinced of it. And if you turn over in your thoughts all the ways that can be imagined concerning this buſineſs, you will find that the way that God choſe for the teſtifying his Son's reſurrection, both to the preſent generation, and to future ages, was the beſt, was the wiſeſt, was the leaſt exceptionable, was the moſt effectual for the gaining credit to it, of any that can be thought of.

And thus much let it ſuffice to have ſpoken touching my text, and the objection that is taken from thence againſt our Lord's reſurrection. All that I ſhall

shall do farther, is to draw two or three useful lessons from this great article of our faith; for our instruction, and for our comfort, and for the awakening us to a sense of our duty; and this by way of application.

And, in the first place, taking it for granted, that our Saviour's resurrection is sufficiently and unexceptionably attested, we have hereby the greatest assurance given to us of the truth of the Christian religion, that we can possibly wish or desire; for it is the strongest and most indubitable seal, that God could set to the verity of all our Saviour's doctrines. It being utterly impossible (as being inconsistent with God's veracity, who cannot set his seal to a lye) that if Jesus had been any other than what he pretended to be, namely, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world, God would have raised him again to life, and taken him up into heaven: especially, our Saviour having more than once publicly declared before-hand, that, after he was put to death, he would thus rise again; and gave that as a sign to the Jews, that he was no impostor, but a true prophet sent from God.

Secondly, Another consequence of our Saviour's resurrection, is, That we have thereby the greatest demonstration given us of the certainty of future rewards in another world: which is the great argument that must prevail upon the spirits of degenerate mankind, to pursue the paths of virtue and holiness. For, by this men might be clearly convinced, that there was another life after this, since they had their own senses to witness it: he that was once dead and buried, now living again, and visibly ascending up into heaven. And the same person that now lived again, had told them before, that all those that believed on him, should be raised up again at the last day, by that Spirit which raised

raiſed him. What more could be thought of for the aſſuring us of a heavenly inheritance, if we be good chriſtians, than this? And what can more powerfully engage us ſeriouſly to endeavour to be ſuch, than the conſideration of that heavenly inheritance?

But, thirdly and laſtly, Another effect, or conſequence of Chriſt's reſurrection, is, that thereby God hath declared him to be judge both of the quick and the dead. This St. Paul tells us in the xviith of the Acts; *God* (ſaith he) *now commandeth all men every where to repent; becauſe he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs, by that man whom he hath ordained, of which he hath given aſſurance unto all men, in that he hath raiſed him from the dead.* And this is the point that St. Peter likewiſe here in my text, takes care to inculcate to Cornelius, when he preached Chriſt's reſurrection to him. *Him* (ſaith he) *God raiſed up the third day, and ſhewed him openly, &c. And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to teſtify that it is he who is ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead.* And laſtly, This is that which the angels declared to the apoſtles while they were looking ſtedfaſtly towards heaven as our Saviour aſcended thither: *Why ſtand ye* (ſay they) *gazing up into heaven? This ſame Jeſus which is taken up from you into heaven, ſhall ſo come in like manner as ye have ſeen him go into heaven.*

O what confuſion will this be to all unbelievers and impenitent ſinners, when they ſhall ſee that very perſon whom they thought ſo meanly of, and whoſe offers of ſalvation they often deſpiſed, appearing in the clouds with ten thouſand glorious angels about him, and coming in the moſt terrible manner that can be imagined,

to

o call them to account for their lives past, and to execute judgment upon all ungodly men!

They will not then any longer (with the scoffers that St. Peter tells us shall be in the last days) say, *Where is the promise of his coming?* for we see *that all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation:* or they shall be convinced, that however his coming was for good reasons deferred, yet he shall then come to purpose; to the everlasting confusion of their faces, that opposed, or despised, or neglected him and his religion.

Then shall they say, Yonder he is, whom we slighted, whose religion we drolled upon, whose servants and followers we took to be no better than a company of credulous fools. Lo! yonder he is in the clouds, whose tenders of mercy we have refused, whose counsels we have rejected, to whose spirit we have done despite, whose sides we have often pierced by our high affronts, in as rude a manner as the soldiers did at Jerusalem. Yonder he is; but no longer a carpenter's son, no longer *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefs*; no longer a mean obscure Galilean; no longer a crucified God; as we in derision called him: but the sovereign of angels, the judge of mankind and devils, and the Lord of all things both in heaven and earth.

On the other side, this reflection, that our Lord by his resurrection is made the judge of the world, doth not afford matter of greater terror to his enemies, than it doth of comfort to his friends and followers. How must it revive the heart of every honest christian, and encourage him to go on patiently and chearfully in the service of his Master, notwithstanding the many frailties and infirmities he groans under; notwithstanding the

the many slips and errors, that after his best endeavours do attend the course of his life; to consider that he, who is to take his accounts at the last day, and to pass sentence upon him, is no other than his dear Redeemer?

If we look upon the judgment to come only in this view, that then all the hidden works of darkness shall be brought to light, the secrets of all hearts be laid open, the actions of all mankind strictly examined and scanned, and sentence pass upon every one according to his works done in the flesh; I say, if we have no other view of the last judgment than only this, it would not be very comfortable to the best of us, who are all sinners, and therefore cannot plead our innocence at that great tribunal. But when we consider farther, that it is our Saviour that shall then sit upon the throne; that it is our Saviour, to whom God hath committed the judging of us; our Saviour, I say, that knows our frame, that is sensible of all the difficulties we have to conflict with, as having himself, in the days of his flesh, had sufficient experience of them *(he having been in all points tempted as we are, only without sin)* and that this Saviour of ours will not judge us according to the rigour of the law, but according to the gracious allowances of the gospel: the consideration of this, I say, will prove an effectual antidote against all the fears, and disquietudes, and despondency we may lie under upon account of our own unworthiness.

Let none of us therefore, that heartily own our Lord Jesus, and his religion, and honestly endeavour to live up to the laws of his gospel, fright ourselves with such thoughts as these: how shall I, poor wretch, dare to appear before the face of my judge, at the last day; who have so many grievous sins to answer for? Let us

but

but go on in the good course we are in, let us but hold the profession of our faith without wavering; and daily apply to the throne of grace, for strength and assistance against our corruptions; and to our prayers add our sincere endeavours to increase in virtue; and the longer we live still to grow better: and then I dare say, whatever sins we may have been guilty of, we shall not need to have any apprehension or fear of our condition, upon account of them, when we come to die; but we may with confidence appear before the tribunal of our Lord, and expect our part in that comfortable sentence which he will at the last day pronounce to all his true disciples and followers; *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, from the foundation of the world.* To which kingdom God Almighty bring us all, &c.

A

# DISCOURSE

OF

# CONSCIENCE,

## With reſpect to thoſe that ſeparate from the Communion of the Church of England, upon the pretence of it, &c.

THERE is nothing more in our mouths than conſcience; and yet there are few things we have generally taken leſs pains to underſtand. We ſit down too often with this, that it is ſomething within us, we do not know what, which we are to obey in all that it ſuggeſts to us; and we trouble ourſelves no further about it.

By which means, it frequently comes to paſs, that though we have eſpouſed very dangerous errors, or happened to be engaged in very ſinful practices, yet believing and acting, as we ſay, according to our conſcience, we do not only think ourſelves perfectly right and ſafe, while we continue in this ſtate, but are effectually armed

ed against all sorts of arguments and endeavours that can be used, for the bringing us to a better mind.

This is too visible in many cases; but in none more than in the case of those that at this day separate from the communion of the church, as it is established among us. Though the laws of the land, both ecclesiastical and civil, do oblige them to join in our communion; though many arguments are offered to convince them, not only that they lawfully may, but that they are bound to do it; though they themselves are sensible, that manifold and grievous mischiefs and dangers do ensue from this breach of communions, and these unnatural divisions, both to the christian religion in general, and to our reformed religion in particular; yet, if to all these things a man can reply, that he is satisfied in his conscience, that he doth well in refusing his obedience to the laws; or, that he is not satisfied in his conscience, that he ought to join with us upon such terms as are required, this single pretence shall be often thought a sufficient answer, both to laws and arguments.

A strange thing this is, that conscience, which, among other ends, was given to mankind for a preservative and security of the public peace; for the more effectually obliging men to unity, and obedience to laws, yet should often be a means of setting them at distance, and prove a shelter for disobedience and disorder: that God should command us to obey our governors in all lawful things, for conscience-sake, and yet that we should disobey them in lawful things for conscience-sake too.

It is the design of this discourse to examine what there is in this plea, that is so often made by our dissenters, for their not complying with the laws, viz.

That it is against their conscience so to do; and to shew in what cases this plea is justly made, and in what cases not; and where it is justly made, how far it will justify any man's separation, and how far it will not. And all this in order to the possessing those who are concerned, with a sense of the great necessity that lies upon them of using their most serious endeavours to inform their consciences aright in these matters, before they presume to think they can separate from us with a good conscience, which is all we desire of them; for it is not our business to persuade any man to conform against his conscience, but to convince every man how dangerous it may be to follow a misinformed conscience.

But before I enter upon this disquisition, it will be necessary, in the first place, to prepare my way, by laying down the grounds and principles I mean to proceed upon. And here, that I may take in all things that are needful to be known before-hand about this matter, I shall treat distinctly of these five heads:

I. *Of the nature of conscience.*

II. *Of the rule of conscience.* And under that,

III. *Of the power of human laws to oblige the conscience.*

IV. *And particularly in the instance of church communion.*

V. *Of the authority of conscience:* or, *How far a man is obliged to be guided by his conscience in his actions.*

I. And first, As for the *nature of conscience*, the truest way to find out that will be, not so much to enquire into the signification of the word conscience, or the several scholastical definitions of it, as to consider what every man doth really mean by that word, when he

he has occasion to make use of it: for, if it do appear, that all men do agree in their notions and sense about this matter, that, without doubt, which they all thus agree in, is the true notion and sense of conscience.

Now, as to this, we may observe in the first place, that a man never speaks of his conscience, but with respect to his own actions, or to something that hath the nature of an action which is done or omitted by him, or is to be done or omitted; matters of mere knowledge and speculation we do not concern our conscience with; as neither with those things in which we are purely passive; as neither with actions, if they be not our own. We do not, for instance, make it a point of conscience, one way or other, whether a thing be true or false; or whether this or the other accident that befals us, be prosperous or unfortunate; or whether another man hath done good or bad actions, in which we are no way concerned. These kind of things may indeed prove matters of great satisfaction or disquiet, of joy or grief to us; but we do not take our conscience to be affected with them. That word never comes in, but with respect to something willingly done, or left undone by us; or which we may do, or may forbear.

Secondly, We may observe, that in common speech we do not either use this word conscience about our actions, but only so far as those actions fall under a moral consideration; that is, as they have the nature of duties or sins, or, as they are lawful or unlawful. Always when we speak of conscience in our actions, we have respect to some law or rule, by which those actions are to be directed and governed, and by their agreeableness or disagreeableness with which, they become morally good or evil.

Thirdly, This being so, the only thing remaining to be enquired into for the finding out what conscience is, is what can be reasonably thought to be our sense and meaning, when we use the word conscience, with such application to our actions, as we have now said. Now for that I desire it may be considered, that when we talk of our actions as we concern our conscience in them, they can but fall under these two heads of distinction; that is to say, in the first place, we either consider our actions as already done, or omitted; or we consider them as yet not done, but as we are deliberating about them. And then, secondly, whether we consider them as done, or not done; as past, or future; yet we rank them under one of these three notions:

We either look upon them as commanded by God, and so to be duties; or as forbidden by God, and so to be sins; or as neither commanded nor forbidden, and so to be indifferent actions. (With these last actions indeed, conscience is not properly or directly concerned, but only by accident, to wit, as those indifferent actions do approach to the nature of duties or sins.) Our actions, I say, do not touch our conscience, but as they fall under some of these heads.

Now, in all these respects, we have indeed different ways of bringing in conscience; but yet, as it will appear, we mean the same thing by it in them all.

First of all, when we are considering an action as yet not done, if we look upon it as commanded by God, we say, we are bound in conscience to do it; if we look upon it as a sinful action, we say, it is against our conscience to do it; if we look upon it as an indifferent thing, we say, we may do it, or not do it, with a safe conscience. Now, I pray, what do we mean by these expressions? I desire that every one would consult his

his own mind, and deny, if he can, that this is the sense of his words: if he saith he is bound in conscience to do this or the other thing, whether he doth not mean this; that he verily thinks it his duty to do that action? If he saith that it is against his conscience to do such an action, whether he means any more than this; that he is persuaded in his judgment, that to do such an action is an offence against God? If he saith that he can do it with a safe conscience, whether he hath any other meaning than this; that, to the best of his knowledge and judgment, the action may be done without transgressing any law of God? This is now undeniably the sense that every man in the world hath, when he makes mention of conscience as to actions that are not yet done, but only proposed to his consideration. So that taking conscience as it respects our actions to be done or omitted, and as it is to govern and conduct them (in which sense we call conscience a guide, or a monitor, and sometimes, though very improperly, a rule of our actions) it can be nothing else, in the sense of all men that use that word, but a man's judgment concerning the goodness or badness, the lawfulness or unlawfulness of actions, in order to the conduct of his own life.

But secondly, If we speak of our actions that are done and past, and consider conscience with reference to them; here, indeed, we do a little vary the expression about conscience, but the notion of it is the same we have now given. As for instance, when we talk of peace of conscience, or trouble of conscience, with reference to some action we have done or omitted; when we say, My conscience bears me witness, that I have acted rightly and honestly in this affair; or my conscience acquits me from blame, as to this or to the other action; or I am troubled in conscience for doing

what I have done: if we turn these phrases into other words, we shall find that there is nothing more at the bottom of them than this; that reflecting upon our own actions, we find, that in this, or the other instance, we have either acted or omitted, as we are convinced in our judgment we ought to do; and the remembrance of this is some pleasure and satisfaction to us; or we have done or forborne something contrary to what we take to be our duty, and the remembrance of this affects us with grief and trouble. But still, in both these instances of expression, that which we mean by conscience, is the same thing as in the former cases, viz. It is our judgment and persuasion concerning what we ought to do, or ought not to do, or lawfully may do; only here we add to it this consideration, that the action which we are persuaded to be good, or bad, or indifferent, is now done or omitted by us, and we do remember it. In the former case, conscience was considered as the guide of our actions; in the latter case it is considered as the witness of our actions: but, in both cases, conscience is the judge; and consequently, in both cases, the notion of it is the same, only with this difference, that in the former it was a man's mind, making a judgment what he ought to do, or not to do; in the latter it is a man's mind, reflecting upon what he hath done, or not done, and judging whether he be innocent or culpable in the matter he reflects upon.

I do not know how to give a clearer account of the nature of conscience in general, than this I have now given. This, I believe, is the natural notion that all men have of it; and there is no expression in scripture about it, but what doth confirm this notion. If, indeed, we put epithets to conscience, and talk of a good conscience, or an evil conscience; a tender conscience,

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or a feared conſcience, or the like; then it includes more, both in ſcripture, and in common language, than I have now mentioned. But to give an account of thoſe things, I am not now concerned, as being without the limits of our preſent enquiry.

II. And now we are ſufficiently prepared for our ſecond general point, which is touching the rule of conſcience; if, indeed, after what we have already ſaid, it be not ſuperfluous to inſiſt upon that.

It appears plainly, by what I have repreſented, that conſcience muſt always have a rule, which it is to follow, and by which it is to be governed: for ſince conſcience is nothing elſe but a man's judgment concerning actions, as good, or bad, or indifferent; it is certain, that a man muſt have ſome meaſures to proceed by, in order to the framing ſuch a judgment about actions; that is to ſay, there muſt be ſomething diſtinct from the man himſelf, that makes actions to be good, or bad, or indifferent; and from which, by applying particular actions to it, or comparing them with it, a man may be able to judge, whether they be of the one ſort, or the other. Now this, whatever it be, is that which we call the rule of conſcience; and ſo much it is its rule, that conſcience can be no farther a ſafe guide, than as it follows that rule.

If now it be aſked, what this rule of conſcience is? or what that is which makes a difference between actions, as to the moral goodneſs or badneſs of them? the anſwer to it is obvious to every body, that it can be nothing elſe but the law of God: for nothing can be a duty, but what God's law hath made ſo; and nothing can be a ſin, but what God's law hath forbidden, the very notion of ſin being, that it is a tranſgreſſion of the law: and laſtly, we call a thing lawful, or indiffer-

ent, upon this very account, that there is no law of God either commanding or forbidding it; and where there is no law, there is no transgression. So that undeniably the great, nay, I say, the only rule by which conscience is to be governed, is the law of God, considered either as it commands actions, or forbids them, or as it neither commands them nor forbids them.

But, in order to the giving a more distinct account of this rule of conscience, there is this needful to be enquired into, viz. In what sense we take, or what we mean by the law of God, when we say, it is the rule of conscience.

Now to this our answer is, That by the law of God, we here understand God's will, for the government of mens actions, in what way soever that will is declared to them.

Now the will of God is declared to men two ways; either by nature, or by revelation; so that the just and adequate rule of conscience is made up of two parts, the law of nature, and God's revealed law.

By the law of nature we mean those principles of good and evil, just and unjust, which God hath stamped upon the minds of all men, in the very constitution of their natures. There are some things eternally good in themselves; such as, to worship God, to honour our parents, to stand to our covenants, to live peaceably in the government, from which we receive protection; and the contrary to these will be eternally evil; the heads of all which things, thus good in themselves, are writ so plainly and legibly in the minds of mankind, that there is no man, who is come to the use of his reason, but must of necessity be convinced, that to practise these things will always be his duty, and not to practise them, will always be evil, and a sin. Now all these

theſe heads and principles put together, is that we call the law of nature; and this is all the rule of conſcience that mankind had, before God was pleaſed to diſcover his will by more particular revelation. And this is that law which the apoſtle ſpeaks of, when he ſaith, *that the gentiles, who had not the law of Moſes, yet had a law written in their hearts*; by their acting according to which, or contrary to which, their conſcience did bear witneſs to them, and did either accuſe them, or excuſe them.

But then, ſecondly, to us chriſtians, God, to this law of nature, hath ſuperadded a revealed law, which is contained in the books of holy ſcriptures; which revealed law yet, is not wholly of a different kind from the former, nor doth it at all void the obligation of it, but only thus: God hath, in his revealed law, declared the precepts of the law of nature more certainly and accurately than before: he hath given greater force and ſtrength to them than they had before, by the ſanctions of greater rewards and puniſhments: he hath likewiſe herein perfected the law of nature, and hath obliged us, in point of duty, to more and higher inſtances of virtue than nature did ſtrictly oblige us to: and laſtly, he hath added ſome poſitive laws for us to obſerve, which were not at all contained in the law of nature: as for inſtance, to believe in Jeſus Chriſt, in order to ſalvation; to make all our applications to God in the name of that mediator Chriſt Jeſus; to enter into a chriſtian ſociety by baptiſm; and to exerciſe communion with that ſociety, by partaking of the Lord's ſupper.

And this is that law which we chriſtians are obliged to, as well as to the law of our natures; and which, as it is a ſummary of all the laws of nature, ſo, indeed, is it a ſummary of all our duty: ſo that if any man will

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call it the great, or only rule of christian conscience, I shall not much oppose him, provided that this be always remembered, that,

In the third place, when we say, that the natural and revealed law of God is the just rule, by which we are to govern our conscience; or when we say, that the law of God, as revealed and contained in the bible, is, to us christians, the just rule; we are so to understand this proposition, as to take into it, not only all that is directly and expressly commanded or forbidden by either of those laws, but also all that by plain collection of right reason, in applying generals to particulars, or comparing one thing with another, doth appear to be commanded or forbidden by them.

So that, by the law of nature, as it is a rule of conscience, we are not only to understand the prime heads, and most general dictates of it (which are but few) but also all the necessary deductions from those heads. And by the law of scripture, as it is the rule of conscience, we are not only to understand the express commands and prohibitions we meet with there in the letter of the text; but all the things likewise that, by unavoidable consequence, do follow from those commands and prohibitions. In a word, when we are deliberating with ourselves, concerning the goodness or badness, the lawfulness or unlawfulness of this, or the other particular action; we are not only to look upon the letter of the law, but to attend farther to what that law may be supposed by a rational man to contain in it. And if we be convinced, that the action we are deliberating about is commanded or forbidden, by direct inference, or by parity of reason, we ought to look upon it as a duty, or a sin, though it be not expressly commanded or forbidden by the law, in the letter of it. And if neither

ther the letter of the law, nor by conſequence from it, nor by parity of reaſon, the action before us appear, either to be commanded or forbidden; in that caſe we are to look upon it as an indifferent action, which we may do, or let alone, with a ſafe conſcience: or, to expreſs the thing more properly, we are to look upon it as an action in which our conſcience is not ſo much concerned as our prudence.

III. Having thus given an account of the rule of conſcience, that which naturally follows next to be conſidered, with reference to our preſent deſign, is, What ſhare human laws have in this rule of conſcience: whether they be a part of this rule, and do really bind a man's conſcience to the obſervance of them, or no? Which is our third general head.

Now, as to this, our anſwer is, That though the laws of God be the great, and indeed the only rule of conſcience, yet the laws of men, generally ſpeaking, do alſo bind the conſcience, and are a part of its rule, in a ſecondary ſenſe; that is, by virtue of, and in ſubordination to, the laws of God.

I ſhall briefly explain the meaning of this in the four following propoſitions:

Firſt, There is nothing more certain, than that the law of God, as it is declared both by nature and ſcripture, doth command us to obey the laws of men.

There is no one dictate of nature more obvious to us than this, that we are to obey the government we live under, in all honeſt and juſt things: for this is, indeed, the principal law and foundation of all ſociety. And it would be impoſſible, either for kingdoms, or ſtates, for cities, or families, to ſubſiſt, or at leaſt to maintain themſelves in any tolerable degree of peace and happineſs, if this be not acknowledged a duty.

And

And then, as for the laws of God in scripture, there is nothing more plainly declared there than that it is God's will, and our duty, to *obey them that have the rule over us*; and to *submit ourselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake, and to be subject, not only for wrath, but for conscience sake.* So that no man can doubt, that he is really bound in duty to obey the laws of men, that are made by just and sufficient authority. And consequently no man can doubt, that human laws do really bind the conscience, and are one part of the rule, by which it is to be directed and governed.

But then having said this, we add this farther in the second place, That human laws do not bind the conscience, by any virtue in themselves, but merely by virtue of God's law, who has commanded, that we should in all things be subject to our lawful governors, not only for wrath, but for conscience sake. Conscience is not properly concerned with any being in the world, save God alone; it hath no superior but him: for the very notion of it, as I have often said, is no other than our judgment, of what things we are bound to do by God's law, and what things we are forbidden to do by God's law.

So that all the men in the world cannot bind any man's conscience, by virtue of any power or authority that is in them: but now God having made it an everlasting law, both by nature and scripture, that we should obey those who are set over us; whether they be our parents, or our masters, and much more our princes, and the sovereign legislative power, under whom we live; by virtue of this command of God, and this only, we are for ever bound in conscience, to govern our actions by the commands that they impose upon

upon us; and those commands of theirs are a rule (though a consequential or a secondary rule) by which we are to govern our conscience, because they are the instances of our obedience to the laws of God.

But then, in the third place, this is also to be remembered; that human laws do no farther bind the conscience, and are a rule of it, than as they are agreeable to the laws of God. If any law, or command of man do clash with any law of God; that is, if it be either evil in itself, or contradictory to the duty of christians, as laid down in the scriptures; in that case, that law or command, by what human authority soever it was made or given, doth not bind our conscience, nor is any rule of our actions. On the contrary, we are not, at any rate, to yield obedience to it; but we are here reduced to the apostles case, and must act as they did, that is, we *must obey God rather than men*; and we sin if we do not. For since God only hath proper and direct authority over our conscience, and human power, only by delegation from him; and since God hath not given any commission to the most sovereign princes upon earth to alter his laws, or to impose any thing upon his subjects, that is inconsistent with them: it follows, by necessary consequence, that no man can be obliged to obey any laws of men, farther than they are agreeable to, and consistent with the laws of God.

There is yet a fourth thing necessary to be taken in, for the clearing the point we are upon, and that is this, That though human laws, generally speaking, may be said to bind the conscience, and to be a part of its rule; yet we do not assert that every human law (though it doth not interfere with any of God's laws) doth at all times, and in all cases, oblige every man's conscience to active obedience to it; so as that he sins against

God, if he transgress it. No, it would be a very hard thing to affirm this; and I do not know what man among us, upon these terms, would be innocent.

Thus much I believe we may safely lay down as a truth; that where either the matter of the law is of such a nature, that the public, or some private person shall suffer damage, or inconvenience by our not observing it: or, secondly, tho' the law, as to the matter of it, be never so trifling; nay, tho' perhaps, all things considered, it be an inconvenient law; yet, if the manner of our not obeying it, be such as gives offence to our superiors, or to any others; that is, either argues a contempt of authority, or sets an ill example before our fellow-subjects: I say, in either of these cases, the transgression of a human law renders a man guilty of a fault, as well as obnoxious to the penalty of that law. But out of these two cases, I must confess, I do not see how a purely human law doth oblige the conscience; or how the transgression of it doth make a man guilty of sin before God. For it is certain, if we secure these two points; that is to say, the good of the public, and of private persons; and withal, the sacredness and respect which is due to authority (which is likewise in order to the public good) we answer all the ends, for which the power of making laws, or laying commands upon inferiors, was committed by God to mankind.

So that though it be true, that human laws do oblige the conscience, yet it is also true, that a great many cases may, and do happen, in which a man may act contrary to a purely human law, and yet not be a sinner before God. Always supposing (as I said) there be no contempt or refractoriness expressed towards the governors; nor no scandal, or ill example given to others by the action. For if there be either of these in the

the caſe, I dare not acquit the man from being a tranſgreſſor of God's law, in the inſtance wherein he tranſgreſſeth the laws of men.

For this is that which we inſiſt upon; that the authority of our governors ought to be held and eſteemed very ſacred, both becauſe the laws of God, and the public good require it ſhould be ſo. And therefore, wherever they do peremptorily lay their commands upon us, we are bound in conſcience ſo far to comply, as not to conteſt the matter with them, nor to ſeem to do it. And tho' their commands, as to the matter of them, be never ſo ſlight; nay, tho' they ſhould prove really inconvenient, either to ourſelves, or to the public; yet, if they ſtand upon them, if they perſiſt in requiring our obedience to them, we muſt yield, we muſt obey; always ſuppoſing they be not againſt God's laws. For we are at no hand, either to affront their authority ourſelves, or to encourage others by our example, to do it. For to do either of theſe things, is a greater evil to the public, than our obedience to an inconvenient law can eaſily be.

IV. And now it is time for us to apply what hath been ſaid in general concerning the rule of conſcience, and the obligation of human laws, to the particular matter here before us; that is, the buſineſs of church communion; the obligation of conſcience to which, in ſuch manner as the laws have appointed, is the fourth general head we are to conſider.

This point of the obligation to communion with the church, as by law eſtabliſhed, hath been largely handled by ſeveral learned men of our church, and particularly it is the argument of one of theſe diſcourſes, which have lately been writ for the ſake of our diſſenters. Thither, therefore, I refer the reader, for full ſatiſ-

satisfaction about this matter, being only just to touc upon it here, as one of the principles we take for gran ed, and shall proceed upon in the following discourse.

And here the proposition we lay down is this, Th it is every man's duty, and consequently every man bound in conscience, to join in communion with th church which is established by law in the place whe he lives, so long as that church is a true, sound part c the catholic church, and there is nothing imposed c required, as a condition of communicating with it, th is repugnant to the laws of God, or the appointment of Jesus Christ.

This proposition is evident, not only because it ne cessarily follows from the foregoing principle; whic was, that every man is bound in conscience to obey th laws of men, that are not contrary to the laws of God and therefore, consequently, a man is bound to obe in ecclesiastical matters, as well as civil (unless it ca be shewed, that Christ hath forbid all human authority whether ecclesiastical or civil; to make any law or orders about religion, which I believe never wa or can be shewed) but it is evident, upon anothe account, which I desire may be considered. We are all really bound by the laws of Jesus Christ, and the nature of his religion, to preserve, as much as in us lies, the unity of the church: which unity doth consist, not only in professing the same faith, but joining together with our brethren under common governors, in the same religious communion of worship and sacraments. And therefore, whoever breaks this unity of the church, by withdrawing his obedience from those church governors, which God hath set over him in the place where he lives; and separating from the established religious assemblies of christians under those

those governors, doth really transgress the laws of Jesus Christ, and is guilty of that sin of schism, which is so very much cautioned against, and so highly condemned in the scriptures of the New-testament: unless, in the mean time, it doth appear to the man, who thus withdraws and separates, that there is something required of him in those assemblies, and by those governors, and that as a term and condition of holding communion with them, which he cannot submit to without sin.

And this point I do heartily wish was well considered by our dissenting brethren. They do seem often to look upon this business of coming to church, and joining with us in prayers and sacraments, no otherwise to bind their conscience, than other purely human laws. They think they owe no obedience to the laws in these matters, different from that which they yield to any common act of parliament. And therefore no wonder they often make so slight a business of them.

But this is a great mistake: there is much more in these things than this comes to. The withdrawing our communion from the church, carries a far greater guilt in it, than the violating any law that is purely human. For though we do readily grant, that all the circumstances of public worship enjoined in the church (as for instance, the times, the gestures, the forms of prayer, the methods of reading the scripture, and administring the sacraments; as also, the habits of the ministers that are to officiate) be all of human institution, and may be altered and varied at the discretion of our governors; yet the public worship itself, under public lawful governors, is of divine appointment, and no man can renounce it, without sinning against Jesus Christ, as well as offending against the ecclesiastical laws.

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A human law, grounded upon a divine, or, to speak more properly, a divine law, modified or clothed with several circumstances of man's appointment, doth create another kind of obligation upon every subject, than a law that is purely human; that is to say, a law, the matter of which is neither good nor evil in itself, but perfectly indifferent. In the former case, we must yield obedience to the law, as to the law of God, however it comes clothed with circumstances of man's appointment: in the other case, we only yield obedience as to the command of man; and for no other reason, than that God, in general, hath obliged us to obey our superiors.

To make this a little plainer; let us, for instance, take the business of paying tribute and custom in this nation, in which case there is a complication of a divine law with a human, as it is in the case we are now upon. That every subject should *pay tribute, to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom is due*; is a law of God, as being a branch both of natural and christian justice: but out of what goods we should pay tribute or custom, or what proportion of those goods should be paid, this is not defined, either by the law of nature, or the law of the gospel, but is left to the determination of the municipal laws of every kingdom. But now, because human authority doth interpose in this affair, and settles what every man is to pay to the king, and out of what commodities; doth it therefore follow, that if a man can, by fraud or concealment, detain the king's right from him, that he incurs no other guilt for this, but only the transgressing of an act of parliament, and the being obnoxious to the penalties, in case he be detected? No, certainly; for although the customs in that manner

ner and form be settled upon the king by human law only, yet the matter of that law being a point of natural justice between man and man, the man that is thus guilty, ought to look upon himself as an offender against the divine law, as an unjust person before God. And his willingness to submit to the forfeiture of his goods, will not render him less unjust, or more excusable.

The case is much the same, as to the matter we have now before us. It is not a mere human law, or act of parliament, that obligeth us to keep the unity of the church; to bring our children to be made christians by baptism; to meet together at solemn times, for the profession of our faith, for the worshipping of God, for the commemorating the death of our Saviour in the sacrament of his supper. All this is tied upon us by the laws of Christ. These things are as much required of us by God, as christians, as it is required that we should pay the king, and every man, what is due to them, if we would not be dishoneſt and unjust. It is true, that the particular forms, and modes, and circumstances of doing these things, are not commanded, nor prescribed by the laws of Christ, in this instance of church communion, no more than they are prescribed by the laws of God, in the other instance I gave: but they are left intirely to the prudence and discretion of the governors that God hath set over us in ecclesiastical matters, just as they are in the other. But, in the mean time, these things, thus clothed by human authority, as to their circumstances; yet being, for the matter of them, bound upon us by Christ himself, we can no more deny our obedience to the public laws about them, than we can in the other instance I have named. And that man may as well, for instance, purge himself from the imputation of knavery before

God, that will contrive a way of his own, for the pay ing his just debts, contrary to what the law of the lan hath declared to be just and honest; as any man ca acquit himself from the sin of schism before God, tha will chuse a way of his own for the public worship different from, and in opposition to, what the laws o the church have prescribed; always supposing, tha the worship established be commanded by just authori ty, and there be nothing required in it, as a condition of communion, that is against the laws of Jesus Christ.

The sum of all this is, that it is every man's duty, by the laws of Christ, as well as the laws of man, to worship God in the way of the church, so long as there is nothing required in that worship, that can justly offend the conscience of a wise and good christian. And therefore, there is more in departing from the communion of the church, when we can lawfully hold it, than merely the violation of a statute, or a human law; for we cannot do it without breaking the law of God. Nay, so much is it against the law of God to do this, that I think no authority upon earth can warrant it. So that even if there was a law made, which should ordain, that wilful, causeless separation from the established church, should be allowed and tolerated, and no man should be called to an account for it; yet nevertheless, such a separation would still be a schism, would still be a sin against God; for no human law can make that lawful, which God's law hath forbid.

There now only remains our last general head about conscience to be spoken to, and then we have done with our preliminary points: and that is, concerning the authority of conscience, or how far a man is obliged to follow or be guided by his conscience in his actions.

When

When we speak of the obligation of conscience, or f being bound in conscience to do or not to do an ac- on; it sufficiently appears from what hath been said, iat we can mean no more by these phrases than this, iat we are convinced in our judgment, that it is our uty to do this or the other action; because we believe iat God hath commanded it. Or we are persuaded i our judgment, that we ought to forbear this or the ther action; because we believe that God hath for- idden it.

This now being that which we mean by the obliga- on of conscience; here we come to enquire, how far iis persuasion or judgment of ours concerning what is ur duty, and what is sinful, hath authority over us; ow far it doth oblige us to act or not act, according o it.

Now, in order to the resolving of this, we must take otice, that our judgment concerning what God hath ommanded, or forbidden, or left indifferent, is ei- her true or false. We either make a right judgment f our duty, or we make a wrong one. In the for- ier case, we call our judgment a right conscience, in he latter we call it an erroneous conscience. As or those cases where we doubt and hesitate, and know iot well how to make any judgment at all (which is hat we call a doubting conscience; but indeed, is pro- erly no conscience, unless by accident) we have no- hing here to do with them, but shall reserve them to another place. Here we do suppose, that we do make a judgment of the thing; that is, we are persuaded in our minds concerning the goodness or badness of this, or the other action: and that which we are to enquire into is, how far that judgment binds us to act accord- ing to it.

Now,

Now, if our conscience be a right conscience; that is, if we have truly informed our judgment according to the rule of God's law; it is beyond all question, and acknowledged by all the world, that we are in that case perpetually bound to act according to our judgment. It is for ever our duty so to do; and there can no blame, no guilt fall upon us, for so doing, let the consequence of our acting, or not acting, be what it will. So that as to a right conscience, or a well-informed judgment, there is no dispute among any sort of men.

But the great thing to be enquired into is, what obligation a man is under to act according to his judgment, supposing it be false, supposing he hath not rightly informed his conscience, but hath taken up false measures of what God hath commanded or forbidden?

Now for the resolution of this, I lay down these three propositions, which I think will take in all that is needful, for the giving satisfaction to every one, concerning this point:

First, Where a man is mistaken in his judgment, even in that case it is always a sin to act against it. Be our conscience never so ill instructed, as to what is good, or evil, though we should take that for a duty which is really a sin; and, on the contrary, that for sin which is really a duty; yet so long as we are thus persuaded, it will be highly criminal in us to act in contradiction to this persuasion; and the reason of this is evident, because, by so doing, we wilfully act against the best light, which at present we have, for the direction of our actions; and consequently our will is as faulty, and as wicked, in consenting to such actions, as if we had truer notions of things.

We

We are to remember, that the rule of our duty, whatever it be itſelf, cannot touch or affect our actions, but by the mediation of our conſcience; that is, no farther than as it is apprehended by us, or as we do underſtand and remember it. So that when all is done, the immediate guide of our actions can be nothing but our conſcience; our judgment and perſuaſion concerning the goodneſs, or badneſs, or indifference of things.

It is true, in all theſe inſtances where we are miſtaken, our conſcience proves but a very bad and unſafe guide; becauſe it hath itſelf loſt its way, in not following its rule as it ſhould have done: but, however, our guide ſtill it is, and we have no other guide of our actions but that. And if we may lawfully refuſe to be guided by it in one inſtance, we may, with as much reaſon, reject its guidance in all.

What is the notion that any of us hath of a wilful ſin, or a ſin againſt knowledge, but this? That we have done otherwiſe than we were convinced to be our duty, at the ſame time that we did ſo. And what other meaſures have we of any man's ſincerity or hypocriſy; but only this? That he acts according to the beſt of his judgment, or that he doth not act according to what he pretends to believe.

We do not indeed ſay, that every one is a good man, that acts according to his judgment; or that he is to be commended for all actions that are done in purſuance of his perſuaſion: no, we meaſure virtue and vice by the rule according to which a man ought to act, as well as by the man's intention in acting. But, however, we all agree, that that man is a knave, that in any inſtance acts contrary to that which he took to be his duty. And, in paſſing this ſentence, we have

no regard to this, whether the man was right, or mistaken in his judgment; for, be his judgment right or wrong, true or false, it is all one as to his honesty in acting or not acting according to it.

He that hath a false persuasion of things, so long as that persuasion continues, is often as well satisfied that he is in the right, as if his persuasion was true; that is, he is oftentimes as confident when he is in an error, as when he is in the right: and therefore we cannot but conclude, that he who, being under a mistake, will be tempted to act contrary to his judgment, would certainly, upon the same temptation, act contrary to it, was his judgment never so well informed: and therefore, his will being as bad in the one case as in the other, he is equally a sinner as to the wilfulness of the crime, though, indeed, in other respects there will be a great difference in the cases.

This, I believe, is the sense of all men in this matter. If a man, for instance, should of a Jew become a christian, while yet in his heart he believeth that the Messiah is not yet come, and that our Lord Jesus was an impostor: or if a papist should, to serve some private ends, renounce the communion of the Roman church, and join with ours, while yet he is persuaded that the Roman church is the only catholic church, and that our reformed churches are heretical or schismatical: though now there is none of us will deny that the men in both these cases have made a good change, as having changed a false religion for a true one; yet, for all that, I dare say, we should all agree, they were both of them great villains and hypocrites, for making that change, because they made it not upon honest principles, and in pursuance of their judgment, but in direct contradiction to both. Nay, I

dare

dare ſay, we ſhould all of us think better of an ignorant well-meaning proteſtant, that being ſeduced by the perſuaſions and artifices of a cunning popiſh factor, did really out of conſcience abandon our communion, and go over to the Romaniſts, as thinking theirs to be the ſafeſt; I ſay, we ſhould all of us entertain a more favourable opinion of ſuch a man in ſuch a caſe, though really here the change is made from a true religion to a falſe one, than we ſhould of either the other men I have before named. All this put together, is abundantly ſufficient to ſhew, that no man can in any caſe act againſt his judgment or perſuaſion, but he is guilty of ſin in ſo doing.

But then our ſecond propoſition is this: The miſtake of a man's judgment may be of ſuch a nature, that as it will be a ſin to act againſt his judgment, ſo it will likewiſe be a ſin to act according to it.

For, what authority ſoever a man's conſcience has over him, it can never bear him out, if he do an evil thing in compliance with it. My judgment is (as we have ſaid) the guide of my actions; but it may, thro' my negligence, be ſo far miſguided itſelf, as that, if I follow it, it will lead me into the moſt horrid crimes in the world: and will it be a ſufficient excuſe, or juſtification of my action in ſuch a caſe, to ſay, that, indeed, herein I did but act according to my perſuaſion? No, verily; I may as certainly be damned, without repentance, for acting according to my judgment in ſome caſes, where it is miſtaken, as I ſhall be for acting contrary to it in other caſes, where it is rightly informed.

And the reaſon of this is very plain. It is not my judgment or perſuaſion that makes good or evil, right

or wrong, justice or injustice, virtue or vice; but it i the nature of things themselves; and the law of Go (and of men under that) commanding or forbidding things, that makes them so. If the moral goodness o badness of actions was to be measured by mens opi nions and persuasions; then good and evil, duty an sin, would be the most various uncertain things in th world. They would change their natures as often a men change their opinions; and that which to-day i a virtue, to-morrow would be a crime; and tha which in one man would be a heroically-good action would in another man be a prodigious piece of vil lainy; though yet there was no difference in th action itself, or in the circumstances of the man tha did it; save only the difference of opinion.

But such consequences as these are intolerable; no indeed, do men either talk or think after this manner Every man, when he speaks of good or evil, lawful o unlawful, means some certain fixed thing, which it i not in his power to alter the nature and property of That action is good, and a duty, which is either so in itself, or made so by some positive law of God; and tha action is evil, and a sin, that is forbid by God, in either o these ways: so that unless it was in our power to chang the nature of things, or to alter the laws of God; it wil unavoidably follow, that we shall be for ever obliged to do some actions, and to forbear others, whatever our judgment concerning them is: and consequently we may be guilty of sin, if in these instances we ac contrary to this obligation; though at the same time it should happen, that we are firmly persuaded that we ought so to do.

And thus is our proposition fully proved: but then for the farther clearing of it, I desire it may be taken

notice of, that we do not thus lay it down, that every mistake of judgment about good or evil doth involve a man in sin, if he act according to that mistake; but only thus, the mistake of a man's judgment may be of such a nature, that as it will be a sin in him to act against it, so it will likewise be sin to act according to it. It is not every error in morals that brings a man under the necessity of sinning, if he pursues it in his actions. A man's conscience may mistake its rule in a hundred instances, and yet he may safely enough act according to it; and the reason is, because a man may entertain a great many mistakes, and false notions of his duty, and act according to them too; and yet, in such actions, he shall not transgress any law of God.

Now, this that I say holds chiefly in these two instances: for example, in the first place, if a man believe a thing to be commanded by God, which yet indeed is not; but neither is it forbidden: as if a man should think himself obliged to retire himself from his business seven times, or three times a day, for the purpose of devotion; or to give half of his yearly income to pious and charitable uses, if he can do it without prejudice to his family. Now, in this case, he is certainly mistaken in his duty; for the law of God hath not bound him up to such measures in either of these instances: but yet, because God hath not, on the other hand, laid any commands upon him to the contrary, it is certain he may, in both these instances, act according to this mistake, without any guilt in the world: nay, so long as that mistake continues, he is bound to act accordingly.

Again, in the second place, if a man believe a thing to be forbidden by God's law, which yet is not; but neither is it commanded: as for instance; if a man

thinks that he ought, by a virtue of a divine command, to abstain from all meats that are strangled, or have blood in them; or if he believe it unlawful to play at cards or dice; or that it is forbidden by God's word to let out money at interest: why, in all these cases he may follow his opinion, though it be a false one, without sin: nay, he is bound to follow it, because it is the dictate of his conscience, however his conscience be mistaken. And the reason is plain, because, though he be mistaken in his judgment about these matters, yet, since God hath not, by any law, forbidden these things, there is no transgression follows upon acting according to such a mistake.

But then, in other cases, where a man's mistake happens to be of such a nature, as that he cannot act according to his conscience, but he transgresseth some law of God, by which conscience ought to be governed: as for instance; when a man looks upon that as a lawful action, or as a duty, which God hath forbidden; or looks upon that as a sin, or at least an indifferent action, which God hath commanded; here it is that the mistake becomes dangerous. And, in such cases, the man is brought into that sad dilemma we have been representing, viz. That if he acts according to his persuasion, he transgresseth God's law, and so is a sinner upon that account: if he acts against his persuasion, then he is self-condemned, and very guilty before God upon that account.

Well, but is there no avoiding of this? Must it be laid down as a constant universal truth, that in all cases where a man's judgment happens to be contrary to the rule of his duty, commanding or forbidding an action, he must of necessity sin, whether he act, or not act according to that judgment? If, indeed, he act against

against his conscience, it is readily granted he sins; but it seems very hard that he should be under a necessity of sinning when he acts according to it; especially when he is perfectly ignorant of, or mistaken in the law, against which he offends.

This is indeed the great difficulty that occurs in this matter; and for the untying it, I lay down this third general proposition, viz. That the great thing to be attended to in this case, of a man's following a mistaken judgment, is the culpableness or inculpableness, the faultiness or innocence of the mistake upon which he acts; for according as this is, so will his guilt in acting according to it be either greater, or less, or none at all.

We do not say, that a man is always guilty of a sin before God, when, upon a misinformation of judgment, he omits that which God's law hath commanded; or doth that which God's law hath forbidden: no, though these omissions or actions may be said to be sins in themselves; that is, as to the matter of them, as being trangressions of God's law; yet before we affirm that they will be imputed to a man as such, that is, prove formally sins to him, we first consider the nature of the action, and the circumstances of the man. If we find, upon examination, that the instance wherein God's law is transgressed, is such an instance, as even an honest-minded man may well be supposed to mistake in: and if we find likewise, that the man had not sufficient means for the informing himself aright as to this matter; and that he hath done all that he could do, in his circumstances, to understand his duty: if in such a case as this he be mistaken in his duty, and act upon that mistake, yet we do not say, that the man is properly guilty of any sin in that action; however,

that action is indeed contrary to the law of God. On the contrary, we believe him to be innocent as to this matter; nor will God ever call him to an account for what he hath done or omitted in these circumstances.

And the reasons and ground upon which we affirm this, are plain and evident at the first hearing. No man can be obliged to do more than what is in his power to do; and whatever a man is not obliged to do, it is no sin in him if he do it not: so that if a man do all that one in his circumstances can, or should do, for the right understanding of his duty; if he happens to be mistaken, that mistake cannot be imputed to him as a sin, because he was not obliged to understand better: and if his mistake be no sin, it is certain, to act according to that mistake, can be no sin neither.

So that the whole point of sinning, or not sinning, in following an erroneous conscience, lies here: whether the man that is thus misperswaded is to be blamed, or not blamed, for his misperswasion. If the error he hath taken up, do not proceed from his own fault and negligence, but was the pure unavoidable effects of the circumstances in which he is placed (which circumstances, we suppose, he contributed nothing to, but he was put into them by the disposition of divine Providence) then, of what nature soever the error be, he doth not contract any guilt by any action which he doth in pursuance of that error: but if it was in his power to rectify that error; if he had means and opportunities to inform his conscience better; and the nature of the action was such, that it was his duty so to do, so that he must be accounted guilty of a gross and criminal neglect in not doing it; in this case the man is a transgressor, and accountable unto God, as such, for all the actions that he doth or omits, contrary to God's

God's law, while he acts under that miſtake, or in purſuance of it. And accordingly, as this neglect or careleſſneſs is greater or leſs, ſo is the ſinfulneſs of the action, which he doth in purſuance of it, greater or leſs likewiſe.

And this is a plain account of this matter. So that we ſee there is no fatal unavoidable neceſſity laid upon any man to commit a ſin, by acting according to his conſcience: but if at any time he be brought under thoſe ſad circumſtances, he brings that neceſſity upon himſelf. God never put any man into ſuch a condition, but that he might do that duty which was required of him, and be able to give a good account of his actions. But here is the thing: men, by their vice and wickedneſs, by neglecting the means of inſtruction that are afforded them, and not uſing their reaſon and underſtanding as they ſhould do, may ſuffer themſelves to be brought under the bondage of ſuch falſe and evil principles, that they ſhall, ſo long as they hold thoſe principles, fall into ſin, whether they act according to their conſcience, or act againſt it.

I have done with the general points concerning conſcience, which I thought needful to be premiſed, as the grounds and principles of our following diſcourſe: I now come to that which I at firſt propoſed, and for the ſake of which all this is intended; that is, to ſpeak to the caſe of thoſe that ſeparate from the communion of the church of England, upon this pretence, that it is againſt their conſcience to join with us in it.

Now all that I conceive needful to be done, in order to a full diſcuſſion of this caſe, and giving ſatisfaction about it, are theſe two things:

Firſt, To ſeparate the pretenſions of conſcience that are truly and juſtly made in this matter, from the falſe

ones: or, to shew who those are that can rightly plead conscience for their nonconformity, and who those are that cannot.

Secondly, To enquire how far this plea of conscience, when it is truly made, will justify any dissenter that continues in separation from the church, as established among us; and what is to be done by such a person, in order to his acting with a safe and good conscience in this affair.

Our first enquiry is, what is required in order to any man's truly pleading conscience for his refusing to join in communion with the established church? or, who those persons are, that can with justice make that plea for themselves?

I think it very convenient to begin my disquisition here, because, by removing all the false pretences to conscience, the controversy will be brought into a much less compass, and the difficulties that arise will be more easily untied. The truth is, if the thing be examined, I believe it will be found, that the pretence to conscience, in the matter we are talking of, is, as in many other cases, extended much farther than it ought to be. My meaning is, that of all those who think fit to withdraw from our communion, and to live in disobedience to the known laws of the church, and pretend conscience for so doing, in a great many of them 'tis not conscience, but some other thing mistaken for conscience, which is the principle they act upon. So that if the true plea of conscience be separated from those counterfeit ones, which usually usurp that name, we shall not find either the persons to be so many that refuse communion with us upon the account of conscience, truly so called; nor the cases to be so many, in which they do refuse it upon that account.

Now,

Now, in order to the making such a separation or distinction between conscience truly so called, and the several pretences to it, in this business of not conforming to the established worship, I lay down this general proposition; That if the principles I have laid down about conscience be admitted, then it is certainly true, that no man among us can justly plead conscience for his separation from the church of England; or can say, that it is against his conscience to join in communion with it, but only such a one as is persuaded in his own mind, that he cannot communicate with us without sinning against God in so doing.

For since, as we have said, conscience is nothing else but a man's judgment concerning actions, whether they be duties, or sins, or indifferent: and since the law of God commanding or forbidding actions, or neither commanding them, nor forbidding them, is the only rule by which a man can judge what actions are duties, and what are sins, and what are indifferent; it plainly follows, that as a man cannot be bound in conscience to do any action, which it doth not appear to him that God's law hath some way or other commanded, and made a duty; so neither can it go against a man's conscience, to do any action, which he is not convinced that God's law hath some way or other forbidden, and so made a sin. And therefore, in our present case, that man only can justly plead conscience for his nonconformity, that can truly say, he is persuaded in his judgment, that conformity is forbidden by some law of God: or, which is the same thing, no man can say, it is against his conscience to join in our communion, but only such a one as really believes he shall sin against some law of God, if he do join with us.

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If againſt this it be excepted, that it is very poſſible for a man to be well ſatisfied that there is nothing directly ſinful in our worſhip; but yet, for all that, it may be againſt his conſcience to join with us in it: as for inſtance, in the caſe where a man takes it really to be his duty to hold conſtant communion with ſome other congregation, where he believes he can be more edified, or to which he is related by ſome church-covenant: to this I anſwer, that in this caſe, I grant, conſcience is rightly pleaded for ſeparation (tho' how juſtifiably I do not now examine) but then, I ſay, this plea proceeds upon the ſame grounds I juſt now laid down: for if the man (as is ſuppoſed in the caſe) be convinced, that it is his duty by God's law (as there is no other meaſure of duty) to hold communion with others, and not with us; then he muſt, at the ſame time, be convinced, that he cannot, without tranſgreſſion of God's law (that is, without ſin) join with us: and that is the ſame account which we give, of its being againſt any man's conſcience to hold communion with us.

Farther; if it be urged againſt our propoſition, that not only in the caſe where a man is perſuaded of the unlawfulneſs of our communion, but alſo in the caſe where he only doubts of the lawfulneſs of it, a man may juſtly plead conſcience for his nonconformity, ſo long as thoſe doubts remain: and therefore it is not truly ſaid of us, that in order to the pleading conſcience for nonconformity, one muſt be perſuaded in his own mind, that conformity is forbidden by ſome law of God: I anſwer, that if the man who thus doubts of the lawfulneſs of conformity, hath really entertained this principle, that it is a ſin to do any thing with a doubting conſcience; I grant, that it muſt go againſt his conſcience to conform, ſo long as he doubts. But then, this is

but

but the same thing we are contending for; for therefore it goes against his conscience to communicate with us, doubting as he doth, because he believes he shall sin against God if he should. But if the man we are speaking of, do not think it a breach of God's law, to act with a doubting conscience; then I do not see how it can, in the least, go against his conscience to communicate with us, upon that pretence. So that notwithstanding these two exceptions, which are all I can think of, 'twill still remain true, that no man can justly plead conscience for his separation from the church, but he that is persuaded that he cannot join with it without sinning against God.

Now, if this proposition be true, as certainly it is, then how many mens pretences to conscience for their separating from us are hereby cut off. And indeed, how few (in comparison of the multitude of dissenters among us) will be left, that can be able with truth to say, that it is against their conscience to communicate with us in our prayers, and in our sacraments.

In the first place, it is evident, that all those who separate from us upon account of any private grudge or pique, because they have been disobliged, or have received some disappointment in the way of our church, or by the men that are favourers of it; and therefore, out of a pet, will join themselves to another communion: all those that think they can serve their own turns more effectually by being of another way; as for instance, they can thereby better please a relation, from whom they have expectances; they can better advance their trade, or increase their fortunes; they can better procure a reputation, or regain one that is sunk: in a word, all those that serve to any ends of pride, or interest or passion, or, out of any other worldly consideration,

deration, do refuſe us their company in the worſhip o God; I ſay, all ſuch are certainly excluded from plead ing conſcience for their ſeparation.

In the ſecond place, all thoſe lay people, who refuſ our communion, upon account that the paſtors anc teachers, whom they moſt love and reverence, are no permitted to exerciſe their function among us; whoſe pretence it is, that, if theſe good men were allowed tc teach in our churches, they would come to our congregations; but ſo long as that is refuſed, they will hear them where they can: I ſay, all theſe are likewiſe excluded from pleading conſcience for their ſeparation. For however it may really and truly be againſt the conſcience of their miniſters to conform (there being other things required of them than of ordinary people) yet it is not againſt their conſcience ſo to do; for they know no ill in conformity, but only that ſo many good men are ſilenced.

In the third place, all thoſe that refuſe our communion, upon a mere diſlike of ſeveral things in our church offices: they do not, for inſtance, like a form of prayer in general, and they have ſeveral things to object againſt our form in particular; they do not like our ceremonies, they do not like the ſurplice, or the croſs in baptiſm; and ſundry other things they find fault with; not that they have any thing to ſay againſt the lawfulneſs of theſe things, but only they have an averſion to them: all theſe men, likewiſe, are cut off from pleading conſcience for their ſeparation: for they do not pretend that it is unlawful, or a ſin againſt God, to join with us in our ſervice (which is the only thing wherein their conſcience can be concerned) but only they are not pleaſed with many things in our ſervice, as fanſying them not to be ſo decent, or convenient,

or not to be ſo prudently ordered as they would have them. But what of all this? Admit the things to be ſo as they fanſy them; yet ſtill, ſo long as they do not think there is any ſin in them, it cannot go againſt their conſcience to join with any aſſembly, in which they are practiſed: becauſe conſcience, as we have often ſaid, is not touched, is not effected, where no law of God is tranſgreſſed.

In the fourth place, all thoſe that are kept from our communion, purely upon the account of education, or acquaintance with perſons that are of another perſuaſion: thoſe that have nothing to ſay againſt our worſhip, but only that they were bred in another way; or thoſe that would join with us in it, but that they know a great many religious, godly perſons, that do condemn it, and therefore they dare not come at us: theſe, now, may be very well-meaning men, but yet they cannot reaſonably plead conſcience, upon this account, for their ſeparation. For it is not a man's education, or the example or opinion of other men, that makes any action to be a duty, or a ſin, but the law of God commanding or forbidding that action. And therefore, before I can ſay that this, or the other action is againſt my conſcience, I muſt believe that God's law hath, either in general, or in particular, either directly, or by conſequence, made that action unlawful. I grant, the opinions of other men, eſpecially thoſe that are learned and pious, are always to be liſtened to in doubtful caſes. But then, no man's opinion can be the rule of my conſcience; nor am I at all concerned in conſcience to follow it, any farther than I am convinced that it declares God's law to me. And therefore, ſure in this caſe of church communion, I can be but very little concerned to follow any man's opinion; when, both there

there are so many persons, and those as learned and as pious as any others, that are of another opinion; and when also the public law, which has much more authority than any private opinion, hath determined what I am to do in the case. So that it is great weakness and sillíness, and not conscience, that prevails with these men I am speaking of, to live in disobedience to the laws. If, indeed, they be really persuaded in their own minds, that our way of worshipping God, is in any part or instance of it unlawful or forbidden (let that persuasion be upon what grounds it will) then they may truly say it is against their conscience to join with us; but, if they be not convinced of this, I do not see how the example, or the advice of their friends and acquaintance, can in the least give them a title to plead conscience for their refusing our communion.

Fifthly, Those that withdraw from the church upon this account, that our governors, in their laws and prescriptions about God's worship, have not rightly used the power which they are intrusted with, but have exceeded their bounds; have made, perhaps, too great encroachments upon christian liberty; or laid more stress than was meet, upon indifferent things: these, likewise, are excluded by the former rule, from pleading conscience for their separation. For admit the lawgivers have been to blame in the exercise of their power in these matters (which yet is sooner said than proved) and have really done more than they can answer to God for; yet, what is this to them? the conscience of the governors is indeed deeply concerned about these things; and they must give an account to God for the abuse of their authority, if there be any; but how this doth concern the conscience of the subject, is not easily understood; so long as what is commanded or enjoined,

ed, doth not appear to interfere with any law of God. But having ſaid this, I fear there is too much reaſon to add; that thoſe who ſo much ſtand up for chriſtian liberty, and would be thought the great patrons of it; do, by their endleſs ſcruples about indifferent things, and refuſing to obey authority in ſuch matters, in all appearance take the moſt effectual courſe to deſtroy all chriſtian liberty, in the true notion of it; and to bring in a religion, that ſhall conſiſt of Touch not, taſte not, handle not, and ſuch other uncommanded things.

Sixthly and laſtly (to name no more inſtances) All thoſe that can communicate occaſionally with us in our prayers and ſacraments: as for inſtance, thoſe that, when they have a turn to be ſerved, when there is an office, or ſome ſuch thing in the caſe, can come to church, and receive the communion, but at other times they do not afford us their preſence: theſe are alſo excluded from pretending to conſcience, for their not conſtantly joining in communion with us. For if, indeed, they did believe it was a ſin in them to join with us in our prayers and ſacraments, with what conſcience dare they do it at all? they ought not, for any worldly good, to venture upon ſuch an action as they do believe to be forbidden by God's law: but if they do not believe, that to join in our communion is a ſinful thing (as, I dare ſay, none of theſe perſons do) then I will be bold to make the inference, that it cannot be more againſt their conſcience to do it thrice, than to do it once; and to do it conſtantly, than to do it thrice.

But let us leave the falſe pretenders to conſcience, and come to the caſe of thoſe, who can juſtly plead conſcience for their ſeparation; or that can truly ſay, it is againſt their conſcience to join in our communion.

Of

Of this ſort are all ſuch, and none but ſuch, as do really believe that our communion is unlawful, or that they cannot communicate with us without ſin, as I have before proved.

As for thoſe that only doubt of the lawfulneſs of our communion, but are not perſuaded that it is unlawful; I do not here conſider them, becauſe they cannot ſay, that it is againſt their conſcience to communicate with us, any more than they can ſay, that they are bound in conſcience to communicate with us; for they are uncertain as to both theſe things, and are not determined either way. But, however, becauſe theſe men may juſtly plead conſcience upon this account; that they think it is a ſin to join with us, ſo long as they doubt of the lawfulneſs of our communion; I ſhall conſider their caſe afterwards, in a particular diſcourſe upon that argument.

Thoſe that I am now concerned with, are ſuch as do believe, or are perſuaded, that there is ſomething in our worſhip, which they cannot comply with, without ſinning againſt God.

And my buſineſs is to examine, whether ſuch a belief, or perſuaſion of the unlawfulneſs of our communion, will juſtify any man's ſeparation from us? or how far it will do it? and what is to be done by ſuch perſons, in order either to their communicating or not communicating with us, with a ſafe conſcience? this is our ſecond point, and I apply myſelf to it.

There are a great many among us, that would with all their hearts (as they ſay) obey the laws of the church, and join in our worſhip and ſacraments; but they are really perſuaded that they cannot do it without ſin: for there are ſome things required of them, as conditions

ditions of communicating with us, which are forbidden by the law of God.

As for inſtance, it is againſt the commands of Chriſt, to appoint, or to uſe any thing in the worſhip of God, which God himſelf hath not appointed. For this is to add to the word of God, and to teach for doctrines, the commandments and traditions of men.

It is againſt the commands of Jeſus Chriſt to ſtint the Spirit in prayer, which all thoſe that uſe a form of prayer, muſt neceſſarily do.

It is againſt the commands of Jeſus Chriſt to uſe any ſignificant ceremony in religion: as for inſtance, the croſs in baptiſm; for that is to make new ſacraments.

It is againſt the commands of Jeſus Chriſt to kneel at the Lord's-ſupper; for that is directly to contradict our Saviour's example in his inſtitution of that ſacrament, and ſavours, beſides, of popiſh idolatry.

Since, therefore, there are theſe ſinful things in our worſhip; and thoſe too, impoſed as terms of communion; how can we blame them, if they withdraw themſelves from us? would we have them join with us in theſe practices, which they verily believe to be ſins? where then was their conſcience? they might, perhaps, by this means, ſhew how much they were the ſervants of men: but what would become of their fidelity to Jeſus Chriſt?

What now ſhall we ſay to this? they themſelves are ſo well ſatisfied with their own doings in theſe matters, that they do not think they are in the leaſt to be blamed for refuſing us their communion, ſo long as things ſtand thus with them. They are ſure they herein follow their own conſcience, and therefore they cannot doubt but they are in a ſafe condition, and may

juſtify

justify their proceedings to God, and to all the world, let us say what we please.

This is the case. Now in answer to it, we must grant them these two things:

First of all, that if indeed they be right in their judgment, and those things which they except against in our communion, be really unlawful, and forbidden by Jesus Christ, then they are not at all to be blamed for their not communicating with us. For, in that case, separation is not a sin, but a duty; we being for ever bound to obey God rather than men.

And secondly, supposing they be mistaken in their judgment, and think that to be unlawful, and forbidden by God, which is not really so; yet so long as this persuasion continues (though it be a false one) we think they cannot, without sin, join in our communion. For even an erroneous conscience (as we have shewed) binds thus far, that a man cannot, without sin, act in contradiction to it. These two things, I say, we grant them, and let them make the best advantage of them.

But then this is the point we stand upon, and which, if it be true, will render this whole plea for nonconformity upon account of conscience, as I have now opened it, wholly insufficient, *viz.* If it should prove that our dissenters are mistaken in their judgment; and that our governors do indeed require nothing of them in the matter of church communion, but what they may comply with, without breach of God's law: then, I say, it will not acquit them from being guilty of sin before God in withdrawing from our communion, to say, that they really believed our communion to be unlawful; and upon that account they durst not join with us.

It

It is not my province here to anſwer all their objections againſt our forms of prayer, our ceremonies, our orders and rules in adminiſtring ſacraments, and other things that concern our communion: this hath been done ſeveral times; and of late by ſeveral perſons, who have treated of all theſe particular matters; and who have ſhewed with great clearneſs and ſtrength, that there is nothing required in our church appointments, which is in the leaſt inconſiſtent with, or forbidden by any law of Jeſus Chriſt: but, on the contrary, the eſtabliſhments of our church are, for gravity, decency, purity, and agreeableneſs with the primitive chriſtianity, the moſt approveable, and the leaſt exceptionable of any church conſtitutions at this day in the world.

Theſe things therefore, I meddle not with; but this is the point I am concerned in, whether, ſuppoſing it be every man's duty to join in communion with the eſtabliſhed church; and there be nothing required in that communion, but what may be lawfully practiſed; I ſay, ſuppoſing theſe two things, Whether it will be ſufficient to acquit any man from ſin, that withdraws from that communion, upon this account, that through his miſtake, he believes he cannot join with us without ſin? or thus, Whether will any man's perſuaſion that there are ſinful terms required in our communion (when yet there are not any) juſtify his ſeparation from us?

This is the general queſtion truly put; and this I give as the anſwer to it: That in general ſpeaking a man's erroneous perſuaſion doth not diſſolve the obligation of God's law, or juſtify any man's tranſgreſſion of his duty. So that if God's law doth command me to hold communion with the church, where I have no juſt cauſe to break it; and I have no juſt cauſe to break it

it in this particular caſe, but only I think I have; my miſperſuaſion in this matter doth not diſcharge me from my obligation to keep the communion of the church; or acquit me from ſin before God, if I break it.

The truth and reaſon of this I have fully ſhewed before, in what I have ſaid about the authority of conſcience. I ſhall now only by way of farther confirmation, aſk this queſtion: Was St. Paul guilty of ſin, or no, when he perſecuted the chriſtians; being verily perſuaded in his own mind that he ought ſo to do, and that he ſinned if he did not? If any will ſay that St. Paul did not ſin in this, becauſe he did not act contrary to his conſcience; they contradict his own expreſs words: for he acknowledgeth himſelf to be the greateſt of ſinners, and that for this very reaſon, becauſe he perſecuted the church of Chriſt. If they ſay that he did ſin in doing this; then they muſt at the ſame time acknowledge, that a man's perſuaſion that a thing is a duty, will not excuſe him from guilt in practiſing it; if really and indeed it be againſt God's law: and on the other ſide, by the ſame reaſon, that a man's perſuaſion that a thing is unlawful, will not excuſe him from guilt in not practiſing it; if indeed God's law hath made it a duty.

So that it infinitely concerns all our diſſenting brethren to conſider very well what they do, when they withdraw from our communion. Schiſm undoubtedly is a great and crying ſin; a ſin, againſt which there are as many hard things ſaid in the diſcourſes of our Lord and his apoſtles, and in the writings of the ancient chriſtians, as againſt any other ſin whatſoever. And therefore let thoſe that forſake our communion; and ſet up, or join with other aſſemblies in oppoſition to ours; I ſay, let them look to it, that they be not involved

volved in the guilt of this dreadful sin. They must be sure that their separation proceeds upon good grounds, if they would free themselves from the imputation of it. It is not always enough to excuse them; that they do believe there are sinful conditions imposed in our communion, and consequently it is their duty to withdraw. For, unless the thing be so indeed, their believing so will not cancel their obligation to our church communion; or make it cease to be schism, to withdraw themselves from it.

This may, perhaps, at the first hearing, seem very strange doctrine to many, but yet it is true for all that: and will appear a little more evident, if we put the case in another instance, wherein we are not so nearly concerned.

Here is one of the Roman catholick persuasion (as they call it) that hath been trained up in popery; and heartily believes it to be the true religion, and the only one, wherein salvation is to be had; and therefore, in obedience to the laws and customs of that church, doth pay religious worship to images; doth pray to saints and angels, doth give divine adoration to the consecrated bread in the sacrament; as really believing it to be turned into the body of Christ, to which his soul, and deity are personally united.

Is now such a person as this guilty of idolatry in these practices, or is he not? He doth verily believe that he is not. He would abhor these practices, if he did in the least believe that God had forbid them, as idolatrous. Nay, he is so far from believing that they are forbid, that, on the contrary, he hath been taught to believe that they are necessary duties, and he cannot be a good catholick, unless he thus worship images, and saints, and the bread of the host. Well, now the point is,

Whether

Whether such a man, believing as he doth, be, upon that account, acquitted from the sin of idolatry? We all grant, that if he had such clear information about these things as we protestants have, he would certainly be an idolater, if he should continue in these practices but whether his belief, and opinion, and persuasion concerning these things, do not excuse him, and make that cease to be idolatry, that would otherwise be so this, I say, is the question: but yet none of us make any great question of it. For we do charge the papist indiscriminately with idolatry in their worship, notwithstanding their disclaiming it; notwithstanding their profession to worship God no otherwise than according to his own will; notwithstanding they do really think themselves obliged in conscience, to give divine worship to the consecrated elements, and those other objects. And we charge them rightly in this. For if it be really idolatry, by God's word, to do these things then it will be idolatry in any man to do them, let his opinion about them be what it will: a man's ignorance or mistake, or false opinion, doth not alter the nature of things; it can neither make that cease to be a duty which God hath commanded, nor that cease to be a sin, which God hath forbidden. All that it will do is, that according to the nature and circumstances of it, it may more or less extenuate the transgression that is committed upon the account thereof.

And the case is just the same in the matter before us. For any man to withdraw his communion from that church, with which he ought, and with which he may lawfully communicate; that is as properly the sin of schism, as it is the sin of idolatry to give divine worship to that which is not God. For any man, therefore, to break the unity of the church, though it be upon

upon this very account, that he doth believe it is his duty so to do; or that he cannot communicate with that church without sin; yet, if this persuasion of his be false, and erroneous, he is no less a schismatic for all this, than the other man is an idolater, that thinks it is his duty to adore images, and those other undue objects of divine worship among the Romanists. It is true, the man's ignorance, or misperswasion, will, according to the greater or less culpability of it, more or less excuse the man's person before God, as it doth in the other case. But it cannot, in the least, make that which God hath made to be schism, to be no schism; no more than in the other case it makes that to be no idolatry, which God's word hath declared to be idolatry.

Well, now admitting all this; here comes the pinch of the thing. It will be said, what would you have a man to do in this case? he cannot conform with a safe conscience, and yet he is a transgressor if he does not. If he comply against his conscience, you grant he is guilty of sin in so doing: if he doth not comply, then you say he is a schismatic, and so is a sinner upon that account. Why, to this I say, that both these things are often true; and here is that dilemma, which men, by suffering their minds to be abused with evil principles and persuasions, do frequently run themselves into. They are reduced to that extremity, that they can neither act, nor forbear acting; they can neither obey, nor disobey, without sin.

But what is to be done in this case? I know nothing but this; that all imaginable care is to be taken, that the error and false principles which misled the man, be deposed; and that his judgment be better informed; and then he may both do his duty, which God's law required of him, and avoid sinning against his conscience.

But how is this to be done? Why, no other way, but by using conscientiously all those means which common prudence will recommend to a man, for the gaining instruction and information to himself, about any point that he desires thoroughly to understand: that is to say, freeing his mind from all pride, and passion, and interest, and all other carnal prepossessions, and applying himself seriously and impartially to the getting right notions and sentiments about his duty in these matters: considering, without prejudice, what can be said on both sides: calling in the best assistance of the ablest and wisest men that he can come by: and above all things, seriously endeavouring to understand the nature and spirit of the christian religion, and to practise all that he is undoubtedly convinced to be his duty; and for the matters in question, most earnestly imploring the assistance of God's Spirit to guide and direct him.

Well, but supposing a man has endeavoured to inform his judgment as well as he can, and hath used all those prudent means that were in his power, to satisfy himself of the lawfulness of our communion, but yet, after all, he is of the same persuasion that he was, *viz.* that he cannot join in our worship without sin; what will we say to such a man as this? Will we still say, that this man must either conform, though against his conscience, or he is a schismatic before God? This is the great difficulty, and I have two things to say to it.

In the first place, we do heartily wish that this was the case of all, or of the most of our dissenters (*viz.* that they have done what they can to satisfy themselves about our communion) for if it was, I do verily persuade myself, that there would presently be an end of all those much to be lamented schisms and divisions which

which do now give ſo much ſcandal to all good men, and threaten the ruin of our reformed religion; and this poor church of England, which hath ſo long laboured and groaned under the furious attacks that have been made upon her by enemies without, and enemies within her own bowels, would, in a little time, be perfectly ſet free from all apprehenſion of danger, at the leaſt, from the one ſort of her adverſaries.

If all our brethren of the ſeparation would ſeriouſly follow after the things that make for peace, and walk by the ſame rule, as far as they were able; and, in things where they were otherwiſe minded, would religiouſly apply themſelves to God for direction, and to the uſe of prudent means for ſatisfaction; I doubt not but the face of things would preſently be changed among us, and we ſhould hear no more of any diviſion or ſchiſm in our nation, that was either dangerous to the church, or to the ſalvation of the men that were concerned in it.

But alas! we fear we have too great reaſon to ſay, that the generality of our diſſenting brethren, even thoſe of them that plead conſcience for their ſeparation, have not done their duty in this matter; have not heartily endeavoured to ſatisfy their minds about the lawfulneſs of conformity, in thoſe points which they ſtick at.

If they had, one would think, that after all their endeavours, they ſhould, before they pronounced conformity to be unlawful, be able to produce ſome one plain text of ſcripture for the proving it ſo, either in the whole, or in any part of it. But this they are not able to do. They do, indeed, produce ſome texts of ſcripture, which they think do make for them; but really they are ſuch, that if they had not ſupinely taken up their meaning upon truſt, but would have been at the

pains of carefully examining them, and uſing ſuch helps as they have every where at hand for the underſtanding them; it would have been ſomewhat difficult for them to have expounded thoſe texts in ſuch a ſenſe, as would infer the unlawfulneſs of our communion.

But farther; I ſay, it is not probable that the generality of our diſſenters, who condemn our communion as unlawful, have ever anxiouſly applied themſelves to the conſidering the point, or gaining ſatisfaction about it, becauſe they do not ſeem to have much conſulted their own teachers in this affair, and much leſs thoſe of our way: if they had, they would have been diſpoſed to think better of our communion, than they do. For, not to mention what the churchmen do teach and preſs in this matter; the moſt eminent of their own miniſters are ready, thus far, to give their teſtimony to our communion, that there is nothing required in it, but what a lay perſon may honeſtly and lawfully comply with, though there may be ſome things inconvenient, and which they wiſh were amended. Nay, they themſelves were ready, upon occaſion, to afford us their company in all the inſtances of lay communion.

But I deſire not to enlarge upon this argument, becauſe it is an invidious one. All that I ſay, is, that we wiſh it was not too apparent, by many evidences, that moſt of thoſe who ſeparate from us, are ſo far from having done all they can to bring themſelves to a compliance with our church conſtitutions, that they have done little or nothing at all towards it; but have taken up their opinions, hand over head, without much thinking or enquiring; and having once taken up an opinion, they adhere to it, without ſcarce ſo much as once thinking that it is poſſible for them to be in the wrong.

If

If you ſpeak of a man, that may with reaſon be ſaid to have done his endeavour to ſatisfy himſelf about the points of his duty in this matter; give us ſuch a one as hath no end, no intereſt to ſerve by his religion, but only to pleaſe God, and to go to heaven; and who, in the choice of the way that leads thither, hath the indifference of a traveller; to whom it is all one, whether his way light on the right hand, or the left, being only concerned that it be the way which leads to his journey's end.

Give us a man, that concerns himſelf as little as you pleaſe in the ſpeculative diſputes and controverſies of religion, but yet is wonderfully ſolicitous about the practice of his duty, and therefore will refuſe no pains or trouble that may give him a right underſtanding of that.

Give us a man, that in the midſt of the great heats and diviſions, and different communions of the church, is yet modeſt, and humble, and docible; that believes he may be miſtaken, and that his private friends may be miſtaken too; and hath ſuch an eſteem and reverence for the wiſdom of his governors in church, or ſtate, as to admit, that it is probable they may ſee farther into matters of ſtate and religion, than he doth: and that therefore every tenet and opinion that was imbibed in his education, that was infuſed by private men of his acquaintance, or that was eſpouſed upon a very few thoughts, and little conſideration, ought not to be ſo ſtiffly maintained, as to controul, or to be ſet in oppoſition to, the public eſtabliſhment of authority.

Laſtly: Give us a man, that where the public laws do run counter to his private ſentiments, and he is at a loſs to reconcile his duty to men with his duty to God; yet doth not preſently, upon this, ſet up a flag of defiance to authority; but rather applies himſelf, with all

the indifference and honeſty he can, to get a true information of theſe matters: and to that end, he prays to God continually for his aſſiſtance; he calls in the beſt helps, and conſults the beſt guides he can; his ears are open to what both ſides can ſay for themſelves; and he is as willing to read a book which is writ againſt his opinion, as one that defends it: in a word, if he be prejudiced or biaſs'd any way, it is on the ſide of authority, being rather deſirous to find himſelf miſtaken, and his governors in the right, than himſelf in the right, and his governors miſtaken. I ſay, ſhew us ſuch a man as this, and we readily grant you have produced a perſon that doth ſincerely uſe his endeavours to ſatisfy himſelf about the lawfulneſs of our communion. But then we muſt ſay this alſo, that as the caſe ſtands between the church of England and the diſſenters, we can hardly believe that ſuch a man will long continue in ſeparation from the church; but will, in a little time, gain the ſatisfaction of ſeeing, not only that he may lawfully join with us, but alſo that it is his duty ſo to do.

But let us admit, that a man may have endeavoured to inform his judgment as well as he can, and yet be ſo far from being convinced that it is his duty to join with us in our worſhip, that he is ſtill of opinion it is his duty to ſeparate from us? What will we ſay of ſuch a man? Will we ſtill brand him for a ſchiſmatic, notwithſtanding he hath done all he can to bring himſelf over to us, but cannot?

To this I anſwer, in the ſecond place, according to the principles I have before laid down, That if ſuch a caſe do ever happen; though the man cannot be excuſed from ſchiſm, as to the matter of it (becauſe wherever there is an actual ſeparation from a church, with which we ought, and with which we may lawfully commu-

communicate, there is an actual ſchiſm commenced, let the pretence for the ſeparation be what it will) yet I truſt, he ſhall not be charged before God with the formal guilt of the ſchiſm, any farther than the error that led him into it was contracted by his own fault.

Though ſchiſm in itſelf (as we have ſaid) be a great ſin; yet we do not ſay, that all thoſe who are engaged in the ſame ſchiſm, are equally guilty before God.

In the firſt place, Thoſe that ſeparate from the church, to ſerve any private ſecular turn; theſe are moſt horribly guilty of ſchiſm, and there is nothing to be ſaid in their excuſe.

In the ſecond place, Thoſe who ſeparate from the church, through miſperſuaſions, and miſtakes of judgment, which they groundleſly and fooliſhly took up, and might have avoided, and would yet ſtill certainly corect in themſelves, if they were but ſo careful and conſcientious about their duty as they ought to be; theſe men have, indeed, far more to ſay for themſelves than the former, but yet they are very blameable, and are bound, as they love their ſouls, to take more care of informing their conſcience aright, that ſo they may leave that ſin they are engaged in.

But thirdly, Thoſe that ſeparate from the church of God, becauſe they know no better, nor ever had means to know better; or thoſe that have ſincerely endeavoured to underſtand their duty, as much as could be expected from one in their circumſtances; yet, through weakneſs of underſtanding, or want of opportunity, light into wrong paths: in a word, thoſe that are unhappily engaged in a ſchiſm, but God Almighty, who ſearcheth the hearts, knoweth that it is not through the fault of their wills, but the misfortune of their circumſtances: I ſay, if there be any man among us that

is in this condition, though he be a schismatic materially, yet he is innocently, at least pitiably, so: and if he be as free from blame in the other parts of his life, he may be a good christian for all that. And God Almighty, we hope, who judgeth of men by their inward sincerity, and not by their outward circumstances, will impute that schism (which in others, perhaps, is a wilful crime) to this man, no otherwise than as a pure sin of ignorance, which shall not (upon a general repentance for all sins, known and unknown) be accounted for at the last day. Especially, if this innocently mistaken man we speak of, do, to the other regularities of his life, add a diligent care in these four following points:

First, That he be not obstinate and pertinacious in his way, but that he keep his mind readily prepared and disposed to receive any conviction, which God, by any means or instruments, shall offer to him.

Secondly, That he separate no farther from the church, of which he ought to be a member, than he needs must; but do chearfully comply with the public laws and establishments, in all those instances, where he is satisfied he may do it with a safe conscience.

Thirdly, That where he cannot give active obedience to the laws, he do, in those instances, patiently and christianly submit to the penalties which those laws inflict; neither exclaiming against his governors, or the magistrates, as persecutors, for enacting or executing those laws; nor using any undue, illegal means, to get himself more ease and liberty; but in all things behaving himself as a quiet and peaceable subject to the government he lives under.

And fourthly, and lastly, That he shew himself a good neighbour, as well as a good subject, in avoiding all

all peevish and bitter censures of those that differ in opinion and persuasion from him; and exercising humanity, and friendliness, and charity to all his fellow-christians.

Whoever, I say, of our brethren of the separation, make good these points: that is to say, are, in the first place, very sincere in their endeavours to inform their conscience aright in the matter of our communion: and, in the next place, when they cannot satisfy their conscience about our way, do yet, in their dissent from us, observe the four particulars I have now named; I should be loth, for my part, to censure them either as ill men, or ill subjects, or ill christians.

But then, all that I have said in this matter, doth no more justify the sin of schism, or extenuate the heinousness of it in its own nature, than it would serve to justify or extenuate the sin of idolatry, if all that I have now said, was applied to the case of an ignorant, well-meaning, devout papist. For I do verily believe, that what I have now represented, by way of apology, for an innocent, mistaken separatist, will hold true, *mutatis mutandis*, in the case of a deluded Romanist, who is invincibly, and without any fault of his, intangled in the practice of their idolatries. But I believe, for all that, the sin of idolatry is in itself a most grievous sin, and so I believe is the sin of schism; and therefore, notwithstanding all that may be said concerning the innocence or excuseableness of some mens mistakes about these matters; yet nevertheless, it infinitely concerns every person to have a care how he be engaged either in the one or the other.

To come to a conclusion: That which I would most seriously press, from what hath been said, is this; it appears from the foregoing discourse, how absolutely

neceſſary it is, that every man ſhould endeavour to inform his judgment aright in the matters that offend his conſcience, before he withdraw his obedience from his lawful governors, and his communion from thoſe that worſhip God in public under them. It appears likewiſe, that it is not enough to juſtify a man's ſeparation, that this or the other thing in our worſhip is really againſt his conſcience; for he may be a great ſinner, notwithſtanding that, for leaving our aſſemblies, if it ſhould prove at laſt that he is miſtaken in his notions.

What therefore ſhould every diſſenter among us do, that hath any regard to his duty, and would preſerve a good conſcience? I ſay, what is there that more concerns him to do, than preſently to ſet about the true informing of his judgment in the points where he is now diſſatisfied, for fear he be found to live in a grievous ſin, all the time he ſeparates from us?

And therefore, let no man that lives out of our communion, ſatisfy himſelf with ſuch frivolous pretences as theſe: that as for all the ſubſtantials of religion, the matters of faith and good life, they do agree with us; and that as for the other matters which concern ceremonies and diſcipline, theſe are nice, controverted points, points diſputed pro and con amongſt the divines; and therefore why ſhould they trouble their heads about them? nay, perhaps if they ſhould, they have neither abilities nor opportunities to underſtand them.

It muſt be confeſſed, that ſomething of this is true; but yet it is nothing to their purpoſe. It is very well that we all agree in the rule of faith and manners; and it would be happy if all the chriſtian world did ſo too: but ſtill, ſchiſm is a dreadful ſin; and a man may as certainly, without repentance, be damned for that, as for being an heretic in his opinion, or a drunkard, for inſtance,

ſtance, in his manners. Sure I am, the ancient chriſtian fathers thought ſo.

It is true likewiſe, that the buſineſs of church government and diſcipline, and other points of eccleſiaſtical conformity, is a matter of diſpute and controverſy among us: but who is it that made it ſo? The church of England, without doubt, would have been very well pleaſed, if there had been no duſt raiſed, no diſpute or contentions moved in theſe matters, but that every member would have done his duty peaceably and quietly in his ſtation: or, that, if any controverſy had aroſe, it ſhould have been debated among learned men, and never have proceeded to ſeparation from the communion.

We do not pretend to lay any ſtreſs upon ſkill and knowledge about theſe matters, in order to a man's ſalvation. We believe and teach, that a man may be a very good chriſtian, and go to heaven, that never underſtood how to juſtify the croſs in baptiſm, or to defend the common prayer-book againſt all the exceptions that are made againſt it. All that we ſay, is, that if any man will ſcruple and except againſt the uſe of theſe things, it lies upon him, nay, he is bound, as he would keep a good conſcience, to uſe the beſt means he poſſibly can, to get ſatisfaction about them: or, if he do not, at his own peril be it; nay, even at the peril of his ſalvation, if he breaks the church's peace and communion upon that account.

And as for thoſe that pretend that theſe are ſubtile points, and above their reach and capacity, and they have not underſtanding and wit enough to dive into them: why, in God's name, who deſires them? We ſay, that they might innocently enough, and with a good conſcience, comply with their governors in theſe points,

points, as they do in a hundred others, without ever diving into them. But ſince, it ſeems, they have wit and underſtanding enough to cavil and find fault with theſe things, and upon that account to deny their obedience to thoſe lawful powers which God hath ſet over them, one would think, they ſhould, at the ſame time, have ſo much honeſty, as ſeriouſly to endeavour to give themſelves ſatisfaction as to thoſe things they find fault with: and this is all we deſire of them; and it is for their own ſake too, as well as ours, that we deſire it. For otherwiſe they will never be able to anſwer, either to God or man, for the horrible inconveniencies and miſchiefs that ariſe to the church of Chriſt, by the diviſion and ſeparation which they are engaged in.

To conclude: if in any inſtance, that famous precept of the apoſtle, of *proving all things, and holding faſt that which is good*, do oblige chriſtians, it doth eſpecially in this. If ever it be a man's duty to ſatisfy himſelf about the goodneſs and lawfulneſs of a thing that he is apt to doubt of, it is certainly in the caſe where his ſuperiors have laid their commands upon him; for there he cannot diſobey without ſin, unleſs he can aſſure himſelf that he hath done all that he can to reconcile their commands with his duty to God; but upon the beſt means he hath uſed, he finds them irreconcileable. For a man to diſobey, till he has done this, is an unwarrantable thing; and, in the caſe that I now ſpeak of, it is no leſs than the ſin of formal criminal ſchiſm.

THE

# THE CASE OF A DOUBTING CONSCIENCE.

I HAVE in a former diſcourſe ſpoken to the caſe of thoſe diſſenters, who ſeparate from the eſtabliſhed church for this reaſon, That they are perſuaded that they cannot lawfully join in our communion. 'I now come to ſpeak to the caſe of thoſe who ſeparate from us for a leſs reaſon, *viz.* Becauſe they doubt whether they may lawfully communicate with us or no; and ſo long as they thus doubt, they dare not come near us, becauſe they fear they ſhould ſin againſt God, if they ſhould do any action with a doubting conſcience.

To this indeed a ſhort anſwer might be given from the former diſcourſe, and that is this, That let the obligation of a doubting conſcience be as great as we can reaſonably ſuppoſe it, yet if communion with our church, as it is eſtabliſhed, be really a duty, then a man's doubts concerning the lawfulneſs of it, will not

make it ceaſe to be ſo, or juſtify his ſeparation from it. For if a man's ſettled perſuaſion, that an action is unlawful, will not ordinarily acquit him from ſin, if he omit that action, ſuppoſing God's law hath commanded it (as I there ſhewed) much leſs will a man's bare doubt concerning the lawfulneſs of an action, juſtify his omiſſion of it in ſuch a caſe.

But becauſe this anſwer ſeems rather to cut the knot, than to untie it; it is my meaning in the following diſcourſe, particularly to examine and diſcuſs this plea of a doubting conſcience, and to ſhew what little force there is in it, to keep any man from conformity, that would otherwiſe conform. Hoping that ſome reader, whoſe caſe this is, may, by what he finds here offered toward his ſatisfaction, either be prevailed with to lay aſide his doubts in the matter of our communion, or at leaſt be convinced, that it is more reaſonable and ſafe to communicate with us, doubting as he doth, than to continue in ſeparation from us.

In handling this caſe of a doubting conſcience, I ſhall obſerve the ſame method I did in the former diſcourſe, becauſe indeed I cannot think of a better; that is, I ſhall endeavour to give an account of theſe four things:

I. Of the nature of a doubting conſcience, and how it is diſtinguiſhed from the other kinds of conſcience.

II. Of the rule of a doubting conſcience, or what meaſures a man is to proceed by, for the determining himſelf in a doubtful caſe.

III. Of the power that human laws, eccleſiaſtical or civil, have, to over-rule a man's doubts in any matter.

IV.

IV. Of the authority of a doubting conſcience, *i. e.* Whether at all, or how for a man is obliged by it?

Theſe four heads do, I think, take in all the difficulties that are in the caſe of a doubting conſcience.

I. I begin with the firſt head, The nature of a doubting conſcience. In ſpeaking to which, I ſhall treat of theſe three things: 1. Of doubting in general. 2. Of ſuch doubts, as do affect or concern a man's conſcience. 3. Of the difference between the doubting conſcience, and the ſcrupulous.

1. As to the firſt of theſe, which is concerning the nature of doubting in general, we may take notice, That a man is properly ſaid to doubt, when he cannot give his aſſent to either part of a contradiction; that is, cannot make a judgment whether the thing he is conſidering, be ſo, or be not ſo; but through the equal, or at leaſt fair probability that is on both ſides of the queſtion, continues irreſolute and undetermined; now, perhaps, he thinks this ſide the more probable, and-by-and-by the other, but he is uncertain as to both, and cannot fix upon either.

So that a doubting mind is not more uſually, than properly, reſembled to a balance, which, by reaſon of the equal weight which is put into both ſcales, is not caſt on either ſide, but hangs in the ſame poſture, or waves up and down, without either ſcale coming to the bottom.

Nevertheleſs, in a doubtful caſe, a man may lean more to one ſide of the queſtion than the other, and yet continue doubtful ſtill. Juſt as there may be ſo much more weight put into one ſcale than the other, as will be ſufficient to incline the balance more to that ſide; while yet that weight is not ſo conſiderable, as to be able

able perfectly to turn it, ſo as to carry down the ſcale to the uſual mark of down-weight, and there to ſettle it.

There is indeed this difference between theſe two things, that a balance, through the exact equality of the weights put into each ſcale, may be ſo poiſed, as to hang perfectly in æquilibrio, without inclination either way, and continue ſo to do: but it will be difficult, if not impoſſible, to put a cauſe or a queſtion, where a man's mind, after all things conſidered, is ſo perfectly indifferent to both ſides of it, as not to be more inclined to chuſe one, than the other.

When once there appears ſo much more evidence on the one ſide of the doubtful caſe, that the mind is enabled to determine itſelf, and to give a ſettled aſſent on that ſide, then the man ceaſeth to doubt any longer; for that which was a doubt before, is now turned into a perſuaſion. And if it be a caſe wherein conſcience is concerned, that which was before a doubting conſcience, is now changed into a reſolved conſcience. Here, to reſume our former compariſon, the balance no longer hangs in æquilibrio, or moves unſettledly this way or that way, but is plainly turned and fixed on one ſide.

It is true, in this caſe a man doth not always determine himſelf with the ſame degree of perſuaſion, or ſatisfaction to his own mind. Sometimes the evidence is ſo ſtrong, as to command an entire aſſent of his underſtanding; an aſſent ſo full, that it hath not the leaſt mixture of doubtfulneſs in it; and this we call an aſſurance, or full perſuaſion. At other times the evidence may be of force enough to gain an aſſent, but yet not ſo ſtrong an aſſent as to exclude all doubt of the contrary; and this kind of aſſent we call an opinion, or a probable perſuaſion. And ſomething like this we may obſerve

obſerve in the balance: the ſcale that preponderates, is not always carried down with the ſame force and briſkneſs; but according as the weight that turns the balance is greater, or leſs, ſo, in proportion, it may plainly be diſcerned that the ſcale deſcends either more ſtrongly and nimbly, or more weakly and ſlowly. But ſtill in both theſe caſes, the man hath formed a judgment of the point; the balance is turned, and wherever this happens, there is an end of the doubt or æquilibrium; and conſequently, if it be in a caſe that concerns a man's conſcience, it ceaſes to be any longer a doubting conſcience, and becomes reſolved and determined, though perhaps not fully ſatisfied and free from all kind of doubt and ſcruple about that thing.

2. And thus much of doubting in general. I now come to conſider it with reſpect to conſcience, i. e. to enquire how far, or in what caſes a man's conſcience is affected with his doubts? Which is our ſecond point under this head.

There are a thouſand caſes, in which a man may be doubtful, as to which his conſcience ſhall be no way concerned. A man's doubts may, indeed be as various as are the objects he hath to conſider, and to make a judgment of; and therefore unleſs we will ſay, that every thing that a man thinks of, or ſaith, or doth, affects his conſcience, we muſt not ſay that every doubt doth.

As a man's conſcience is not touched or affected with any thing but his own actions; ſo neither do a man's doubts affect or touch his conſcience, any farther than they concern his actions. So that doubts about matters of meer ſpeculation (as whether ſuch a propoſition be true or falſe) and likewiſe doubts about matter of fact (as whether ſuch a thing was done or not done) which

do

do not relate to the government of a man's own actions, theſe doubts do not concern his conſcience.

As a man's conſcience is not affected with his own actions, under any other notion or conſideration, than only as God's law is to regulate them, *viz.* as they are either commanded by that law, or forbidden by it: ſo neither do a man's doubts concerning his actions, affect his conſcience any farther, or upon any other account, than only as God's law may be tranſgreſſed by doing or not doing the action he doubts of; that is, as he may ſin againſt God, either by omitting the action, when God's law hath commanded it, or by doing it, when God's law hath forbidden it.

So that in all doubtful caſes, where a man apprehends no danger of tranſgreſſing God's law, whether he doth the action he doubts about, or doth it not, there his conſcience is not properly concerned.

And this is ſo true, that tho' we ſhould ſuppoſe one ſide of the action in queſtion to be really, all things conſidered, more expedient and more eligible than the other; yet ſo long as we are ſatisfied that we may, without breach of God's law, chuſe either ſide, we are not concerned in conſcience to chuſe that ſide which is the moſt expedient, or the moſt eligible. For the truth of this, beſides the reaſon of the thing, we have the authority of St. Paul, who when this caſe was propoſed to him, whether it was better for the chriſtians in thoſe times to marry, or not to marry? he thus reſolves, That though indeed, as things then ſtood, it was better not to marry, yet they might do what they would; for if they did marry, they ſinned not: and though (as he ſaith) *he that gave not his virgin in marriage, did better than he that gave her in marriage*; yet he allows,

that

that *he that gave her in marriage did well*, and conſequently did act with a good conſcience. Vid. 1 Cor. vii.

3. From what hath been ſaid, we may be able to give a clear account of the nature of a doubting conſcience, and to diſtinguiſh it from the other ſorts of conſcience; particularly that which they call the ſcrupulous, which is our third point under this head.

Conſcience is uſually, though how properly I will not now diſpute, diſtributed into theſe three kinds, the reſolved, the ſcrupulous, and the doubting.

When we ſpeak of a reſolved conſcience, every body knows that we mean no more by that phraſe than this, that a man is ſatisfied and reſolved in his own mind, concerning the action he hath been deliberating upon, *viz.* that he is bound to do it, as being a duty; or that he is bound to forbear it, as being a ſin; or that he may either do it, or forbear it, as being an indifferent action, neither commanded, nor forbidden by God. Now this perſuaſion, if it be according to the rule of the divine law, we call it a right conſcience: if it be contrary to that rule, we call it an erroneous conſcience. But of this we need ſpeak no more here, ſince it was the whole argument of the former diſcourſe.

As for the ſcrupulous conſcience, as that is made a diſtinct ſort of conſcience from the reſolved and the doubting, we may thus define it: it is a conſcience in ſome meaſure reſolved, but yet accompanied with a fear of acting according to that reſolution. It is the unhappineſs of a great many, that when they are pretty well ſatisfied in their judgment concerning this or the other point, which they made a matter of conſcience, and have nothing conſiderable to object againſt the evidence that is given them, but, on the contrary, are convinced that they ought, or that they may lawfully

act

act thus or thus; yet for all that, when they come to act, they are very uneasy, and make a world of difficulties. Not that there is any new reason appears that can pretend to unsettle, much less overthrow the grounds of their first determination; but only their unaccountable fears must pass for reasons. This now is to have a scrupulous conscience in the proper sense.

But a doubting conscience (which is that we are now concerned in) though in common speech it be often confounded with the scrupulous, is quite different from both these sorts of conscience. For in both those, a man is supposed to have passed a judgment in his mind, whether the action before him be according to God's law, or against it. But in the case of a doubting conscience, it appears, from what I have said, that a man hath not, nor cannot, so long as he doubts, make any judgment at all, but is uncertain as to both sides; having, as he thinks, as many arguments to incline him one way, as the other; and when once he comes to have so much evidence, as to create a persuasion or opinion on one side, then he ceaseth to have a doubting conscience.

So that the true definition of a doubting conscience, as it is commonly called, is this: The suspence of a man's judgment in a question about the duty or the sin of an action, occasioned by the equal (or near equal) probabilities on both sides.

And likewise, the true difference between a doubting, a resolved, and a scrupulous conscience, is this; that the resolved conscience is satisfied about its point, and acts confidently, at least chearfully: the scrupulous conscience is likewise satisfied in the general, but either dares not act, or acts fearfully. The doubting conscience is not satisfied at all; for the point before it,

is

is ſtill a queſtion, of which it can make no judgment, no reſolution, becauſe of the equal appearance of reaſon on both ſides.

This is a plain account of the doubting conſcience. But after all, it muſt be acknowledged, that this which we call a doubting conſcience, and which we have been all this while diſcourſing of, is, truly and ſtrictly ſpeaking, ſo far from being any particular ſort or kind of conſcience, as we have hitherto ſuppoſed it, that it is no conſcience at all.

Conſcience, as we have often ſaid, is a man's mind making a judgment about the morality of his actions; but that which we are now talking of, is a man's mind making no judgment as to that point, but continuing wavering, and undetermined. Now, how a man's judgment, and his no judgment, which are the contradictories to one another, ſhould agree in the ſame common nature of conſcience, is not eaſy to be underſtood. The truth is, by the ſame logic or propriety of ſpeech, that we ſay a doubting conſcience, we may alſo, if we pleaſe, ſay an unreſolved reſolution, or a perſuaſion without an aſſent. But however, becauſe uſe hath given the name of conſcience to the doubting mind, and becauſe conſcience is ſometimes really concerned about acting in doubtful caſes, I chuſe to follow the common way of ſpeaking.

II. I now proceed to our ſecond general head, which is concerning the rule of a doubting conſcience.

In ſpeaking to this, I ſhall do theſe two things; *viz.* I ſhall ſhew,

Firſt, What kind of rule we here ſpeak of; that is, which conſcience needs in a doubtful caſe?

Secondly, What that rule is, or wherein it doth conſiſt?

1. As to the firſt of theſe. When we ſpeak of the rule of a doubting conſcience, we do not mean ſuch a rule, by which a man ſhall be enabled to reſolve all his doubts concerning every point, ſo as that he ſhall ceaſe to doubt any longer concerning that point: but we mean only ſuch a rule, by which a man may be directed how to determine himſelf in every douhtful caſe, ſo as to act with a ſafe conſcience, whether he can get rid of his doubts or not.

There is juſt as much difference between theſe two things, as there is between doubting, for inſtance, whether a thing in general, be lawful, or not lawful; and doubting what I am to do in a particular caſe, where I doubt of the lawfulneſs of the thing. The firſt of which doubts, the caſuiſts call a ſpeculative doubt, the other a practical.

It is plain, that a man may often very eaſily come to a reſolution of this latter kind of doubt; that is, be very well ſatisfied what it becomes him to do, as to this preſent action, without being able to reſolve his doubt of the former kind.

Thus, for inſtance, a man may not be able to reſolve this queſtion, whether it be lawful, or not lawful, to play at cards or dice? Which is the ſpeculative doubt, as the ſchools call it: but he may be very able to reſolve this queſtion, what is moſt reaſonable for him to do, in the caſe of ſuch a doubt: Again, a man may not be able to reſolve this doubt, whether the preſent war, in which his prince is engaged, be a juſt war or no? But yet he may be very well able to ſatisfy himſelf as to the practical doubt; that is, what is his duty to do, in caſe his prince command him to ſerve in that war, concerning which he doth thus doubt?

Now,

Now, it is in the doubts of this latter kind, theſe practical doubts, as they are called, that conſcience is directly and immediately concerned; and conſequently, for the reſolving of which, it chiefly needs a rule to direct it. For if a man can but get ſatisfied what is moſt agreeable to his duty to do, as to the preſent action he doubts about, it is no great matter, as to his conſcience, whether he can get his general or ſpeculative doubts about that action reſolved, or no. Theſe kind of doubts, if they cannot be reſolved, muſt be overruled.

The truth is, it is a very idle thing, for men to talk, that a man muſt do no action, till all his doubts about it be reſolved. Thus far, we grant, it concerns him, that his doubts ſhould be reſolved, *viz.* That he ſhould be ſatisfied in his own mind, that that ſide of the action he determines himſelf to, is, all things conſidered, the more fit and reaſonable to be choſen: and to direct a man in making ſuch a choice, is our principal buſineſs under this head. But if it be meant, that a man muſt ſo reſolve all his doubts about an action, as to ſee clearly through all the ſpeculative points which occaſion his doubts, ſo as to be able to untie all the difficulties which before entangled his underſtanding, and from intrinſic arguments, drawn from the nature of the thing, to pronounce concerning the merits of the queſtion; I ſay, if this be their meaning, there is nothing more abſurd than to ſay, that a man is not to do an action, 'till he hath reſolved or depoſed all his doubts about it.

For in many caſes this is utterly impoſſible to be done; the perſon concerned, perhaps, having no ſufficient means for the obtaining ſuch a reſolution of his doubts as we ſpoke of; or, if he had, the caſe may be ſuch, as will not allow him ſufficient time of conſidera-

tion for the doing it, for he muſt either act or not act preſently; and he is in equal perplexity, both as to the one, and as to the other. What now, in ſuch a caſe, can a man poſſibly do, more than this? *viz.* by his own reaſon, and the advice of his friends, to get ſatisfied what is moſt reaſonable, and moſt agreeable to his duty, for him to do in the preſent circumſtances, and to proceed accordingly; for as for other kind of reſolution of his doubts, as things ſtand with him, he hath not the leaſt proſpect of it.

And indeed, when all is ſaid, we ſee, *de facto*, that this is the uſual way of proceeding among men, even thoſe that are very honeſt and conſcientious. I dare ſay, if we take all the doubtful caſes that happen, where there is one caſe, in which a man proceeds to action, upon ſuch a reſolution of his doubts as we before ſpoke of, there are ten caſes where the doubt is over-ruled, and the man proceeds to action without ſuch a reſolution, ſitting down ſatisfied with this, that though he cannot anſwer the difficulties on both ſides, yet, all things conſidered, it is moſt reaſonable for him in the preſent circumſtances, to act thus, rather than otherwiſe; for this he takes to be moſt agreeable to his general duty; or this is that which wiſe and good men, whom he hath conſulted, do adviſe him to.

And now, having ſufficiently explained what kind of reſolution of doubts that is, which a man's conſcience ſtands in need of, in order to his acting ſafely in a doubtful caſe,

2. I come to the ſecond queſtion upon this head, which is, What that rule is, by which we are to proceed, in thus reſolving our doubts, or determining ourſelves to one ſide or other, in any doubtful caſe that happens to us?

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In anſwer to this enquiry, I ſhall do theſe two things: Firſt, I ſhall give ſome account of the general rule by which a doubting conſcience is to be guided. Secondly, I ſhall apply this general rule to the ſeveral heads of doubtful caſes, wherein a man's conſcience may be concerned; that ſo every one may be furniſhed with ſome principles, for the determining himſelf in any matter, concerning which he happens to have a doubt.

I. As to the firſt of theſe, whoever hath conſidered what we have before ſaid, will eaſily be perſuaded, that nothing ought to turn the balance, in a doubtful caſe, but the greater weight of reaſon on one ſide than the other. For ſince the very notion of doubting, is the ſuſpence of a man's judgment in a queſtion, upon account of the equal appearances of reaſon on both ſides of it; it is plain, that that which is to ſettle the judgment, and to determine the doubt, can be nothing elſe but this, *viz.* That, after all things conſidered, there doth appear greater reaſon to lie on this ſide of the queſtion, than there doth on that. So that the general rule of a doubting conſcience, and from which the meaſures of reſolving all particular caſes, are to be taken, cannot be laid down otherwiſe than thus; *viz.* That in all doubtful caſes, that ſide which, all things duly conſidered, doth appear more reaſonable, that is to be choſen.

I am not ignorant that the caſuiſts have uſually propoſed this rule in other terms, *viz.* That in all doubtful caſes, the ſafer ſide is to be followed. But I do purpoſely avoid the expreſſing it ſo, becauſe of the uncertain meaning of the ſafer ſide. For according as that word is expounded (as it may be expounded different ways) ſo is the rule, ſo worded, true or falſe.

If we take ſafety in the ſtrict and proper ſenſe, an as it is, indeed, uſually underſtood, *viz.* as it is oppo ſed to any hazard or danger; it is ſo far from being a adequate rule of a doubting conſcience, in all caſes, t follow the ſafer ſide, that in many caſes it will be ver unadviſeable ſo to do.

Sure I am, that in doubtful caſes, which concer the civil life, no wiſe man doth always make this a rul to himſelf. We ſee a hundred inſtances every day where men venture upon the leſs ſafe, and the mor hazardous ſide, upon the account of other reaſons an conſiderations, which they think ought more to pre vail with them.

It is certainly, in general ſpeaking, more ſafe (tha is, more free from hazard or danger) to travel on foot than on horſeback; to ſtay at home, than to go int foreign countries; to traffick by land, than to ventur one's ſtock on the uncertain ſeas. But yet, for al this, the conſideration of the eaſe and expedition that i to be had in the firſt caſe, and the improvement an benefit that is to be hoped for in the ſecond, and th gain and profit in the laſt, do, we ſee, every day over balance the conſideration of ſafety in theſe caſes, an determine a man not to that ſide which is freeſt fron danger, but to that which is more convenient, or mor uſeful, or more advantageous.

And thus it is likewiſe, as to thoſe doubtful caſes wherein a man's conſcience is concerned. I ſuppoſe that when we ſpeak of the ſafer ſide of any action, wit reference to conſcience, we generally mean that ſide on which there appears the leaſt hazard or danger c tranſgreſſing any law of God. But now, in this ſenſ of ſafety, I do not think that it is always a good rul for a doubting conſcience, to chuſe the ſafer ſide: o th

the contrary, I think, that if the rule be thus put, and thus underſtood, it will often prove a ſnare to a man's mind, and rather entangle him farther in difficulties, than help him out of them.

If it was received as a rule, that a man is, in all his actions, to keep himſelf at the greateſt diſtance he can, from the danger of ſinning (which is the notion of ſafety I hear ſpeak of) I dare ſay, there are very few perſons that converſe much in the world, but have reaſon, almoſt every day, to call themſelves to account for tranſgreſſing this rule. For they do every day engage in ſuch actions, in which they cannot but acknowledge, that they do expoſe themſelves to a greater danger of ſinning, than if they had not engaged in them.

Thus, for inſtance, what man is there among us, who, although he know himſelf to be prone enough to the ſin of intemperance, in eating or drinking, when temptations are offered; and accordingly, for this reaſon, doth moſt ſeriouſly ſet himſelf againſt this particular ſin; yet makes any great ſcruple of going to feaſts and entertainments, when he is invited by others; nay, or of making them himſelf, when decency, or civility, or the ſerving any of his temporal affairs, doth require him ſo to do? But yet it is certain, that by thus doing, he runs a much greater hazard of falling into the ſin he fears, than if he ſhould forbear all ſuch occaſions or temptations of intemperance.

Many other inſtances, which daily occur in human life, might be given, wherein good men, nay, even the beſt of men do, for the ſake of their buſineſs, or other laudable deſigns, which they think fit to purſue, frequently venture to expoſe themſelves to ſuch dangers of ſinning, as they might have avoided; and this with-

out any reproach from their own conscience, or any censure from other men.

The truth is, God hath no where commanded us to avoid all possible danger of sinning, but only to avoid all sin when we are in danger. It is enough for the securing a man's duty, that he doth not transgress the laws of God in any action that he takes in hand: but it is not required that he should, in every instance of his conversation, preserve himself from the utmost possibility, or (if you will) danger of so doing. For, upon this supposition, it would be impossible for one to live like a man of this world, and perform the common offices of civil life, and much more to live to any great purposes for the serving his generation. Indeed, the result of all would be, that whoever would approve himself to be truly religious and conscientious, must abandon all secular affairs, and retire to a cloister or a desart.

But it may be said, what is this to our business? Those we now spoke of, are supposed to be fully satisfied in their own minds, that they may safely venture on the more dangerous side of an action, for the sake of some considerable good that they design in that action: but the case we are now concerned in, is that of one who is altogether doubtful whether he may lawfully do the action or no. To this I answer, that my business is now to give an account of the rule, by which men are to proceed in determining themselves in doubtful cases; and that which I have said, doth thus far, I think, come home to that business, that if it be allowed that it is advisable in any case, to forsake the more safe side of an action; and to chuse the most hazardous; we will take it for granted, that it may be as advisable in a doubtful case, as in any other, until it

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be made appear, that God hath appointed a rule for doubting perſons to govern themſelves by, different from that he hath given to other men: or, to ſpeak the thing more plainly, till it be made to appear, that thoſe who are ſo unhappy as to doubt, are debarred of the privilege of acting according to the beſt of their reaſon and diſcretion, which men that do not doubt are allowed to do.

But to come more ſtrictly to the point. I do believe there do abundance of doubtful caſes, properly ſo called, frequently happen, in which no man of underſtanding, although we ſuppoſe him never ſo honeſt, doth think he is obliged to determine himſelf to that ſide of the action, on which he apprehends there is leaſt danger of ſinning: but, on the contrary, he will often forſake that ſide which is ſafer, in this ſenſe, for that which doth more recommend itſelf to him upon other accounts.

Thus, for inſtance, ſometimes doubtful caſes do happen, in which the greater probability on one ſide, will turn the balance againſt the greater ſafety on the other. Thus, if a man ſhould doubt, whether it may be lawful to eat any thing ſtrangled, or that hath blood in it (becauſe there are ſome paſſages in the ſcripture, that ſeem to forbid theſe meats) and ſhould repair to ſome intelligent perſon about this matter, who ſhould give him ſuch an account of thoſe texts, and of all the other difficulties in this affair, that the man comes away ſatisfied, that it is far more probable that all kinds of meats are allowed by the chriſtian religion, than that any are forbidden.

I aſk now, whether this degree of ſatisfaction have not weight enough to put an end to a man's doubt in ſuch a caſe as this, ſo as that he may, with a quiet

conſcience, eat of theſe meats as there is occaſion? I believe moſt men will be of this opinion; but yet, the doubt here is not determined on the ſafer ſide, but on the more unſafe. For it is certain, a man is in leſs danger of ſinning, if he wholly forbear theſe meats, than if, for the ſerving a preſent convenience, he do eat of them. And the reaſon is plain; becauſe there are fair grounds from the ſcripture, and antiquity, for making it a queſtion, whether theſe meats be lawful or no; and it is really yet a queſtion among many, and it was lately ſo to the man himſelf: but no man in the world ever made a queſtion, whether theſe meats might not at any time be lawfully forborne, there being no law of God pretended, that obliges a man to eat of them.

Again, as the greater probability will turn the balance againſt the ſafer ſide of a doubt; ſo oftentimes ſuch doubtful caſes do happen, in which, when the probabilities are equal on both ſides, the conſideration of the greater temporal advantages on the one ſide, will have weight enough with a very honeſt man, to overbalance the conſideration of the greater ſafety on the other. [Still taking ſafety in the ſenſe we before gave.]

Thus, for inſtance, ſuppoſe one ſhould demand of another man a ſum of money, which he pretends to be due to him; and the man, of whom it is demanded, after the ſtricteſt and moſt conſcientious enquiry he can make, is not ſatisfied in his own mind that it is due. But ſuch is the confidence of the demander, and ſuch appearances of reaſon he offers, that the man comes to doubt equally, whether it be due or no; ſo that there are here equal probabilities on both ſides. The thing in queſtion now is, Whether it be adviſeable in point of conſcience, for the man to pay the money demanded,

till

till he have better evidence of the juſtice of the demands?

If a man be to follow the ſafer ſide, it is certain he muſt pay it. For it is undeniably more ſafe, that is, farther removed from the danger of ſin, to ſatisfy the demands, though it be to his own loſs. For by this means he perfectly ſets himſelf free from the apprehenſions even of the poſſibility of wronging his neighbour, which is the ſin that he fears in this caſe: whereas if he do not pay the money, he is uncertain whether he detains the man's right from him or no.

But then, on the other hand, if he ſhould pay the money when it is no way due (as he hath as much reaſon to believe that it is not due, as that it is) how ſhall he anſwer to his wife and children, for parting with ſuch a ſum, which, as his circumſtances may be, he cannot ſpare without great prejudice to them?

This is the caſe, and theſe are the arguments that are to be urged on both ſides of it; and I leave it to any conſidering man to judge which ought to prevail. I am pretty confident, that moſt men will thus determine, *viz.* That ſince in this caſe it is as probable, that the demands aforeſaid are unjuſt, as that they are juſt; and ſince no man is obliged to depart from that he is poſſeſſed of, till it do appear by good evidence, that it is due to another man: and ſince, withal, it is unreaſonable ſo to do, when it will be to the prejudice of a man's ſelf and his family; theſe things being ſo, it will be more adviſeable for the man, in this caſe, to keep his money, till it be either by law adjudged, or he have more convincing proofs to his own conſcience, that he ought to pay it.

I think I need not uſe either more inſtances, or more words, to ſhew that it is not always a rule to a doubt-

ing conſcience, to chuſe the ſafer ſide of the doubt, taking the ſafer ſide for that which is at the greateſt diſtance from the danger of ſinning: it being abundantly plain, that many doubtful caſes may, and do happen, in which, though one ſide may appear farther removed from the danger of tranſgreſſing God's law; yet while it doth not appear that the other ſide is unlawful, and withal it is evident, that upon other accounts that ſide is more eligible to a prudent perſon, no good man (if he be but as wiſe as he is good) will make any difficulty of waving the ſafer ſide for the more prudent, and that without thinking himſelf ever the leſs conſcientious for ſo doing.

But after all this, if, on the other hand, any man have another notion of ſafety, than that we have now been ſpeaking of; that is to ſay, will enlarge the ſignification of the word, and will call by the name of the ſafer ſide, not that which hath only this to recommend it, that it is farther removed from the danger of ſinning; but that which is freeſt from all dangers and inconveniencies of all kinds whatſoever: ſo as that ſhall always be the ſafer ſide of a doubtful caſe, which, after all things conſidered, doth appear to be moſt agreeable to the man's duty in the circumſtances he is in, or which is attended with the feweſt abſurdities and evil conſequences of all ſorts, and doth beſt ſerve all the intereſts ſpiritual and temporal, taking both together, that a wiſe and a good man can propoſe to himſelf: I ſay, if any man do mean this by the ſafer ſide, I do readily agree with him, that it will for ever, and in all caſes, be a true, and a wiſe, and a good rule (nay, I add, the only one, to a doubting conſcience) to follow the ſafer ſide.

But

But then, in this ſenſe of ſafety, the ſafer ſide, and the more reaſonable, is all one thing. And conſequently this rule of following the ſafer ſide, and that I before laid down, of following the more reaſonable, are the ſame in ſenſe, though differently expreſſed. Only I think this latter way of expreſſion is more plain, and leſs liable to miſconſtruction, and therefore I choſe it. But it is indifferent to me how men word things, ſo long as we agree in our ſenſe.

II. Having thus given an account of the general rule, by which a man is to determine himſelf in doubtful caſes: I come now, in the ſecond place, to treat of the ſeveral heads, or ſorts of doubtful caſes, wherein a man's conſcience is concerned, and to make application of this rule to them; and this it will be no hard matter to do, admitting the grounds we have before laid down.

There is no doubt wherein conſcience is concerned, but it will of neceſſity fall under one of theſe two ſorts: It is either a ſingle doubt, or a double one.

We call that a ſingle doubt, when a man doubts only on one ſide of the action, but is very well ſatisfied as to the other. As for inſtance, he doubts concerning this or the other particular action, whether it be lawful for him to do it; but on the other ſide he hath no doubt, but is very well aſſured, that he may lawfully let it alone. Or, on the contrary, he is very well ſatisfied that the action is lawful, and that he may do it; but he doubts whether God's law hath not made it a duty, ſo that he cannot lawfully omit it. This is that which we call a ſingle doubt.

We call that a double doubt, where a man doubts on both ſides of an action; that is to ſay, he doubts on one ſide, whether he be not bound to do this action;

God's law, for any thing he knows, made it a duty. But on the other ſide, ſo is the action circumſtantiated with reſpect to him, or he with reſpect to it, that he doubts whether he be not bound to forbear the action, as it is now preſented to him; God's law having, for any thing he knows, forbid it. So that he is at a loſs what to do, becauſe he fears he may ſin, whether he doth the action, or doth it not. I ſay, it will be impoſſible to put any doubtful caſe, wherein a man's conſcience is concerned, which will not fall under one of theſe two heads.

1. Now, as to the caſe of a ſingle doubt, we may thus apply the general rule. That when a man doubts only on one ſide of an action, there it is more reaſonable to chuſe that ſide of the action, concerning which he hath no doubt, than the other, concerning which he doubts, ſuppoſing all other conſiderations be equal.

And here comes in that famous maxim, which had obtained both among chriſtians and heathens, *Quod dubitas ne feceris*; which, with the reſtriction I have now mentioned, will for ever be good advice in all caſes of this nature.

It muſt needs be unreaſonable to venture upon any action where a man hath the leaſt fear or ſuſpicion that it is poſſible he may tranſgreſs ſome law of God by it, when it is in his power to act without any fear or ſuſpicion of that kind; ſuppoſing all along, this conſideration of the poſſibility of offending by this action, be not overbalanced, and ſo the fear of it removed, by other conſiderations which the circumſtances of the action do ſuggeſt.

Thus, for inſtance: here is a man doubts whether it be allowable in a chriſtian to drink a health, or put out money to intereſt, or to go to law; as having converſed

verſed with ſuch men, or ſuch books, as do condemn theſe practices, and that not without ſome colour from the word of God. The man is not, indeed, ſo convinced by their diſcourſes, as to have taken up any opinion or perſuaſion that theſe practices are unlawful; nor would he cenſure any man that uſes them, becauſe he ſees there are as good men, and, for any thing he knows, as good arguments for the other ſide: but he is not ſo clear in his judgment about theſe points, as to be able to pronounce any thing poſitively concerning them either way. He cannot ſay, that he believes them lawful, though he is not perſuaded that they are unlawful, which is the true ſtate of a doubting mind. Now in theſe, and all other ſuch like caſes, the rule is plain, That while a man's judgment continues thus in ſuſpence, it is more reaſonable for him to forbear theſe practices. For there is no pretence of obligation upon him from God's law to engage in any of them, and why ſhould he raſhly throw himſelf into danger, by venturing upon an action, concerning which he is uncertain whether it be lawful or no? He runs no hazard by forbearing theſe things, but if he practiſe them he doth.

Thus far is right. But then, as I ſaid, this is always to be underſtood with this proviſo, *Cæteris paribus*. For if there ſhould happen to be ſuch other conſiderations in the action, as have force enough to overbalance this conſideration of uncertainty; it will then be reaſonable to chuſe that ſide of the action, concerning which I did before doubt, rather than that, of which I had no doubt at all.

Thus, if the man that makes a queſtion about any of the three things I before mentioned, ſhould light into ſuch circumſtances, that, for inſtance, he muſt either

ther drink such a single health, or a quarrel is like to ensue; nay, and that perhaps to the danger of some of the lives of the company. Or again, That he has no means of improving his money (in which his whole fortune consists) in any other way but by that of usury; so that he and his family must in time starve, unless they be maintained by this course. Or lastly, If an orphan be trusted to his care, and the estate of that orphan is so entangled, that he must be put upon the necessity either of waging a law-suit for the clearing it, or suffering his near relation, committed to his charge, to be defrauded of his right: I say, if the cases happen to be thus circumstantiated; he that before doubted in general, whether it was lawful to drink a health, or to put out money to usury, or to engage in law-suits, may, I should think, certainly satisfy himself, that it is not only lawful, but expedient in this particular case, notwithstanding his general doubt to do any of these things; and if he be a wise man, he will make no scruple of acting accordingly.

Indeed he cannot be well excused if he do not thus act: for it will not be sufficient to say, I doubt, whether these practices are lawful or unlawful, and therefore I dare not engage in them. Why, man, if you only doubt about them, you do by this acknowledge, that for any thing you know, they may be lawful, as well as that for any thing you know, they may be unlawful. And if you be thus in æquilibrio, sure such pressing considerations as those which are presented in this case, ought to turn the balance. Otherwise I do not know how you will answer, either to yourself, or the world, for the consequences that may ensue. For my part, in such cases as these I should think, that nothing less than a belief or persuasion that the thing in question

question is unlawful, will justify a man's prudence in acting on that side which he calls the safer, and which, had not these circumstances happened, would really have been so.

To conclude; If a great good may be compassed, or a great evil may be avoided, by doing a thing concerning which we have a general speculative doubt whether it be lawful or no; this very consideration is in reason sufficient to silence the doubt; that is, 'tis enough to persuade us, that it is not only lawful, but adviseable, to do that in the present circumstances, which before, and out of those circumstances, we doubted in general whether it was lawful to be done or no.

II. And thus much concerning the rule, by which we are to proceed in the case of a single doubt; I now come to consider that which we call a double doubt, and to shew what is to be done in that case.

A double doubt, as I have said, is this; when a man doubts on both sides of an action; that is to say, he doubts on one side whether he be not bound to do this action, God's law having, for any thing he knows, commanded it; but on the other side, so doth the action come circumstantiated to him, that he doubts whether he be not by some other law of God bound to forbear it as it is now offered: so that he is at a loss what to do, because he fears he may sin whether he do the action, or do it not.

That which is commonly said in this case, *viz.* That the man that is entangled, must get his doubt removed, and then he may with a safe conscience act, or not act, according as he is satisfied in his own mind, is, as I said before, very often impertinent; for it is no more in a man's power to leave off doubting when he

he will, than it is in the power of a ſick man to be well when he will. And beſides, tho' it might be ſuppoſed that the man, with time and good counſel, might be enabled to extricate himſelf out of this perplexity; yet in our caſe that benefit is not always allowed; for perhaps the circumſtances of the caſe are ſuch, that the man is under a preſent neceſſity either of acting or not acting; and whether he doth the one, or the other, he doubts he offends God.

But what then is a man to do in this caſe? Why, he is to follow the ſame rule that he doth in all other doubtful caſes, and which we have been all this while inſiſting on; that is to ſay, he is to act as reaſonably as he can: and if he do this, I am ſure he incurs no blame, whether he do the action he doubts about, or do it not. If there ſhould happen to be any ſin in the action, it comes upon ſome other account than that of acting with a doubting conſcience.

But now the application of this general rule to our preſent caſe is various, according to the degrees of the man's doubtfulneſs, compared with the degrees of the ſin he is in danger of, by acting on the one ſide or the other; and likewiſe according as other conſiderations do happen about the action, which ought to have ſome influence in determining the man. However, I think all thoſe varieties may be compriſed in theſe four following propoſitions:

Firſt, If the ſin we are afraid of, in doing or not doing the action, doth on both ſides appear equal, there we are to determine ourſelves to that ſide where we have the leaſt doubt of offending God; that is to ſay, to that ſide which to our reaſon appears more probable to be free from the danger of ſin, rather than that other which is leſs probable to be free from that danger: For certainly

certainly this will always be reaſonable, that a man ſhould chuſe a greater probability before a leſs, ſuppoſing all other things equal.

But, ſecondly, If we doubt equally on both ſides, ſo that we apprehend that we are in like danger of tranſgreſſing God's law, whether we do the action or do it not: in this caſe we are to determine ourſelves to that ſide, on which it doth appear we ſhall be guilty of the leaſt ſin; for certainly, by the ſame reaſon for which we are obliged not to ſin at all, we ſhall be obliged to chuſe a leſs ſin rather than a greater, where we cannot avoid ſinning.

Thirdly, If the doubt be unequal, and the ſin likewiſe unequal; that is, if it ſo happen that one ſide of the caſe is more probable, but the other ſide leſs ſinful, as not involving a man in ſo heinous a crime as the other would, if it ſhould prove that he was miſtaken: in this caſe a man may chuſe either the one ſide or the other; according as the degree of the probability, or the degree of the ſin, compared with one another, do preponderate.

The caſe may be ſuch, that there is ſo much more probability on the one ſide than the other; and likewiſe ſo inconſiderable a difference and diſproportion between the ſins we are in danger of on each ſide, that a wiſe man will be determined to the more probable ſide, and venture all the conſequences of his miſtakes on the other.

But then, on the other hand, the caſe may likewiſe be ſuch, that the conſequences on one ſide, if a man ſhould happen to be miſtaken, are ſo terrible, that they will over-balance all the probabilities on the other ſide, let them be never ſo great (ſuppoſing they do not amount to ſo much evidence as to create a perſuaſion,

and

aud ſo put a man out of the ſtate of doubting.) Now here a wiſe man will not act on the more probable ſide, but on that which ſets him free from the danger of theſe conſequences. Thus, if a priſoner was tried for a capital offence, and the evidence againſt him doth not appear ſo full as to create a perſuaſion in the judge or jury that the man is guilty, tho' indeed it is more probable that he is, than that he is not: in this caſe, I believe, all men will ſay, that, conſidering there is ſo great diſproportion between the evil of condemning an innocent perſon, and acquitting a guilty one (it being murder in the one caſe) the judge or jury ſhould rather follow the ſafer ſide than the more probable; and ſo clear the man, rather than find him guilty.

Fourthly, If the caſe be ſuch, that the man doubts equally on both ſides, and the ſin he is afraid of appears likewiſe to him to be equal on both ſides: here other conſiderations are to turn the balance. In this caſe he is to conſider what prudential inducements he has to do the action, or forbear it; as, how far his eaſe and quiet, his advantage and benefit, his good name and reputation, his friends or his family is concerned one way or other: and ſince all other conſiderations, that are of a moral nature, are equal on both ſides, thoſe of this kind, which are the ſtrongeſt, muſt add ſo much weight to the ſcale, as to determine the man either to do the action he doubts about, or to let it alone.

And indeed, it cannot be denied that theſe conſiderations will often have a great influence, even upon a good man, not only in the caſe I have now put, where the directly moral arguments are equal on both ſides, but in all the other doubtful caſes I before mentioned.

We

We may talk very rationally about the degrees of probability, and the degrees of ſin, and what weight each of them is to have with us, and all this with ſo much evidence, that no man can deny the reaſonableneſs of the rules we lay down in *Theſi*; but yet, when we come to act, we find that ſcarce any man doth exactly proceed according to theſe rules, but mixes ſome of thoſe prudential conſiderations, which I have mentioned, with his deliberations; and tho' they do not wholly, yet they help to turn the balance: and, for my part, I dare not ſay, that all thoſe who thus proceed, are to be blamed for ſo doing, ſuppoſing that the caſe wherein they thus act, be a caſe of pure doubt, and there be no perſuaſion on either ſide; and withal, that the man who thus proceeds, is ſatisfied in his own mind with his proceeding. The truth is, when all is ſaid, every man in doubtful caſes is left to his own diſcretion; and if he acts according to the beſt reaſon he hath, he is not culpable, tho' he be miſtaken in his meaſures.

Theſe are all the rules that are to be given in the caſe of a double doubt; and I think no body can object againſt the truth of them. But I am ſenſible of another objection that may be made, and that is, why do I mention them at all, ſince to the generality of men, for whom this diſcourſe is intended, they ſeem altogether impracticable? For how few are there, who are competent judges of theſe different degrees of probability or ſinfulneſs in an action, that we here talk of; and much leſs are capable of ſo balancing theſe things one with another, as to be able from thence to form a good judgment upon the whole matter?

But to this I anſwer, That if rules are to be given at all for the determining men in doubtful caſes, we muſt

muſt give theſe, becauſe we can give no other; theſe being the only principles that men have to govern their actions by in theſe caſes: and I truſt alſo, they will not be wholly uſeleſs to the moſt ordinary capacities for the purpoſes they are intended; becauſe all may hereby at leaſt learn thus much, *viz.* What methods they are to proceed by, for the guidance of their actions in doubtful caſes: and tho' they may have falſe notions of the dangers and the degrees of particular ſins, and ſo may ſometimes make falſe applications of theſe rules to their own caſe; yet it is enough for their juſtification, as I ſaid before, that they have reaſoned as well as they can; ſince they are not bound to act in doubtful caſes according to what is beſt and moſt reaſonable in itſelf; but it is abundantly ſufficient that they do endeavour it.

But, to render theſe rules about a double doubt more intelligible, and more uſeful, I think it will not be amiſs to give my reader a ſpecimen, both how they are to be applied to particular caſes, and likewiſe, when they are applied, what light they give to a man for the chuſing his way in any doubtful caſe he happens to be engaged in. And ſince it would take up too much room to give every particular rule a ſeveral inſtance, I ſhall pitch upon one caſe, under which I may conſider all the varieties of a double doubt I have now repreſented; and it ſhall be that celebrated caſe of the ſacrament; than which, we have not a greater, or a more frequent inſtance of this kind of doubt in any caſe among us. And becauſe I would not, by the diſcuſſion of this caſe, divert my reader (againſt his will) from the main argument, I have taken care to have it ſo marked in the print, that every one may without trouble (if he have no mind to read it) paſs it over as a long parentheſis, and go on to the next point.

This

This is the caſe:

" Here is a man that believes it to be his duty to " take all opportunities of receiving the ſacrament, or " at leaſt to take it frequently; but, on the other " ſide, ſuch is his condition, that he is conſtantly un- " der great fears and apprehenſions of his being un- " qualified for it: and to receive the ſacrament un- " worthily he knows to be a great ſin: not that there " is any grievous notorious ſin lies upon his conſci- " ence unrepented of; much leſs that he is engaged " in ſome vicious courſe, which he is unwilling that " his new vows at his approach to the Lord's table, " ſhould divorce him from; for indeed he deſires and " endeavours *in all things to live honeſtly*, and *to keep* " *a conſcience void of offence towards God, and to-* " *wards man.*

" But this is the caſe: He is not ſo devout a chriſti- " an, nor lives ſo pure and ſpiritual a life, as he thinks " becomes the partakers of ſuch heavenly food. Or, " perhaps he cannot bring himſelf to ſo feeling a ſenſe " and contrition for his paſt ſins, or ſuch ardours of " love and devotion to our Saviour, as he hath been " taught that every worthy communicant ought to be " affected with. Or perhaps he wants faith in the " blood of Chriſt, not being able to apply the benefits " of his paſſion ſo comfortably to his own heart as he " thinks he ought to do. Or perhaps, in the laſt " place, his mind is ſo haunted with a company of " idle and naughty fancies, eſpecially when he ſets him- " ſelf to be more than ordinarily ſerious, that he thinks " it would be a great profanation of the ſacrament for " him to come to it in ſuch circumſtances.

" Theſe,

" Theſe, or ſuch like, are the things that trouble " him: and tho' he hath ſeveral times endeavoured to " put himſelf into a better condition, yet he could ne- " ver ſatisfy himſelf, nor get over theſe difficulties. " What now muſt this man do; He would fain re- " ceive the ſacrament, as thinking himſelf bound to " do it; but he dare not receive it, as looking upon " himſelf to be unqualified for it: if he do not come to " the Lord's table, he denies his attendance on the " moſt ſolemn ordinance of chriſtianity, and ſo doubts " he ſins on that account; if he do come, he doubts " he approaches unworthily, and ſo ſins upon that " account.

" It is here to be remembred, that the queſtion to " be ſpoken to in this caſe is not this: what courſe the " man is to take for the curing or removing his doubt- " fulneſs in this matter, that ſo he may come to the " ſacrament with ſatisfaction to his own mind; but " this: ſuppoſing the man, after all his endeavours, " cannot cure or remove his doubt, what muſt he do? " Muſt he come to the ſacrament, or muſt he for- " bear? One of them he muſt do, and yet, which of " of them ſoever he chuſeth, he fears he ſins.

" If the former had been the queſtion, the reſolu- " tion of it would have been thus: that the man is to " uſe the beſt means he can to get better inſtruction " and information about the nature and ends of the " chriſtian ſacrament, and about the qualities and diſ- " poſitions that are needful to fit a man for it, parti- " cularly thoſe of faith and repentance; for it is the " man's ignorance or miſtake about theſe things, that " makes him paſs ſo hard a cenſure upon himſelf, and " ſo occaſions all the doubtfulneſs in this caſe. If he " once come rightly to underſtand theſe points, his

" doubts

" doubts would of themſelves fall to the ground; and " the man would be perfectly ſatisfied, that as his " caſe is (ſuppoſing it to be ſuch as I have now re- " preſented) he may, without any fear or ſcruple in " the world, at any time approach to the holy table; " becauſe he is indeed in ſuch a ſtate and diſpoſition " of mind as renders him habitually qualified for the " performance of that duty.

" But this, as I ſaid, is not the queſtion before us: " we here ſuppoſe the man, either thro' want of means " of inſtruction, or thro' ſtrong prejudices from edu- " cation, or the like, to be incapable at preſent of " this ſatisfaction, and to be in great perplexity on " both ſides; and that which we are to enquire into, " is, to which ſide of the doubtful caſe he muſt de- " termine himſelf. Shall he receive the ſacrament " doubting as he doth? or, ſhall he forbear it doubt- " ing as he doth?

" Now, I ſay, a man hath no other way of coming " to a reſolution of this queſtion, but by applying the " rules I before laid down to his preſent caſe; which " may be done in this manner:

" Since the man we ſpeak of, doubteth that he ſins " whether he come to the ſacrament, or forbear; the " firſt thing to be conſidered is, on which ſide he " doubts leaſt; or which ſide appears to him moſt " likely and probable to be free from the danger of ſin- " ning: for, if all other things in the caſe be equal, " the balance is to be turned on that ſide, according to " our firſt propoſition.

" Now, if our preſent queſtion be put upon this " iſſue, I am confident the man, whoſe caſe I am re- " preſenting, will think it more reaſonable to repair " to the ſacrament, even in that evil poſture he takes

" himſelf

" himself to be, than customarily to abstain from it;
" because by thus doing he doth certainly follow the
" more probable, and less doubtful or dangerous side
" of the question: for it is evident, he cannot pretend
" to be half so certain of this particular, *viz.* That he
" is unprepared for the sacrament, which is the reason
" of his abstaining, as he is certain in the general,
" that it is his duty to frequent it.

" If indeed the man was a person of ill life and man-
" ners: or if he had been lately guilty of any notorious
" wilful sin, and came to the Lord's table with that
" sin upon his conscience unrepented of; then I will
" grant he had some reason to believe, that he was as
" much in danger of sinning by receiving unworthily,
" as by withdrawing himself from God's ordinance.
" But the case here is not so: the man is really an
" honest well-meaning christian; nor hath he done
" any thing of late, which can give him any suspicion
" of his having forfeited that title: only thro' his mis-
" take about the notion of preparation for the sacra-
" ment, he apprehends, he is not qualified as he ought
" to be; tho' yet, if most others were to be judges of
" his condition, they would say, he was. Why, cer-
" tainly in this case it must be evident to the man,
" that he runs a greater danger of transgressing the law
" of God, by absenting himself from the communion,
" especially if he do it customarily, than if he should
" come to it with all his fears and doubts about him;
" for, as I said, his fears and doubts of his own un-
" worthiness cannot possibly be so well grounded, as
" his fears and doubts that he sins against God by ha-
" bitually denying his attendance on that great christi-
" an service; for these are founded on the express laws
" of the gospel; the others are founded only on un-

" certain conjectural ſurmiſes about his own condi-
" tion: that is to ſay, he is certain that he is bound
" to take frequent opportunities of paying his homage
" to Jeſus Chriſt in the ſacrament, but he cannot pre-
" tend to have ſuch aſſurance in his caſe, that he is
" unqualified for paying that homage.

" But, ſecondly, Let us ſuppoſe the doubt is equal on
" both ſides; that is to ſay, that the man hath as
" much reaſon to believe that he is an unworthy re-
" ceiver, if he receives at all, as he hath reaſon to be-
" lieve that it is a ſin in him if he do not receive;
" which yet can hardly be ſuppoſed in our caſe: but
" let us ſuppoſe it; nay, if you pleaſe, let us ſup-
" poſe the man doth certainly ſin, whether he re-
" ceives or forbears: here then this comes to be con-
" ſidered, which of theſe two ſins is the leaſt; to re-
" ceive unworthily, yet out of a ſenſe of duty; or not
" to receive at all: for on which ſide ſoever this laſt
" ſin happens to be, to that ſide the man is to deter-
" mine himſelf, according to our ſecond rule; it be-
" ing eternally reaſonable, that of two evils we ſhould
" chuſe the leaſt, when we cannot avoid both.

" Now putting the caſe before us upon this iſſue,
" there needs no more to be done for the reſolving it,
" than only to aſk this general queſtion:

" Which is the greater ſin of theſe two, for a man
" to omit a known duty, and ſo to break a known law
" of God for conſcience ſake; or to yield obedience
" to that law for conſcience ſake, when yet it ſo hap-
" pens, that a man cannot do that, without breaking
" another law of God in the manner of his perfor-
" mance of that duty? For my part, I ſhould think,
" that the man who doth this laſt, tho' he cannot be
" ſaid to be innocent, yet he is guilty in a far leſs de-

" gree

" gree than the man that practiſeth the former; and
" a great deal more is to be ſaid in his juſtification.

" Let us ſuppoſe two men, both of them conſcious
" to themſelves, that, as things ſtands with them,
" they are not in a fit condition ſo much as to ſay their
" prayers, or to perform any other act of religious
" worſhip as they ought to do: now one of theſe men
" doth upon this account forbear all prayers, both pub-
" lic and private, neither uſing his cloſet, nor fre-
" quenting the church: the other hath ſuch a ſenſe of
" what both natural religion and chriſtianity do oblige
" him to in this matter, that he dares not forbear his
" uſual offices, either public or private, tho' yet he
" believes he ſinfully performs them.

" If the queſtion now be put, which of theſe two
" is the better man, or the leaſt offender; I dare ſay
" that all men will give their judgment in favour of
" the latter, tho' yet no wiſe man will think that this
" perſon is to be excuſed for living at ſuch a rate, that
" he cannot ſay his prayers without ſin.

" This judgment, I ſay, men would paſs in this
" caſe; and there is a great deal of reaſon for it; for
" certainly no indiſpoſition that a man hath contract-
" ed, of what nature ſoever, will take off from his
" obligation to obey the laws of God.

" If a man cannot do his duty ſo well as he ought,
" he muſt at leaſt do it as well as he can: and there-
" fore, let his circumſtances be what they will, he
" muſt needs be leſs criminal in performing a known
" duty in the beſt manner that his condition will allow
" him, tho' with many and deſerved reflections upon
" his own unworthineſs, than in wholly omitting or
" diſuſing that duty: becauſe a neglect in the manner

" of performing a duty, is a leſs fault than to neglect " the ſubſtance of it.

" Let this now that I have ſaid be applied to our " caſe, and we have an eaſy reſolution of the queſtion " before us, *viz.* That ſince a greater ſin is to be a- " voided before a leſs, when a man ſuppoſes himſelf " to be under a neceſſity of being guilty of one, it is " more reaſonable that the man we ſpeak of ſhould " come to the ſacrament with all his doubts concern- " ing his unworthineſs, than that he ſhould cuſtoma- " rily and habitually withdraw himſelf from it; be- " cauſe it is a greater ſin to do this latter than the for- " mer.

" Well; but ſome ſay, how can this conſiſt with " St. Paul's doctrine, who expreſsly affirms, That " *whoever eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and* " *drinketh damnation to himſelf?* 1 Cor. xi. 29. Can " there be any more dreadful ſin than that, which if " a man be guilty of, it will actually damn him? Cer- " tainly one would think by this, that a man runs a " much leſs hazard in not receiving at all, than in " venturing to receive, whilſt he hath the leaſt doubt " that he receives unworthily, conſidering the dread- " ful conſequences of it.

" But to this I briefly anſwer: Such a man as we " all along ſuppoſe in our caſe, is in no danger at all " of receiving unworthily, in the ſenſe that St. Paul " uſeth this term: for the unworthy receiving, that " he ſo ſeverely cenſures in the *Corinthians*, was their " approaching to the Lord's table with ſo little a ſenſe " of what they were about, that they made no diſtinc- " tion between the Lord's *body* and *common food*; " 1 Cor. xi. 29. 21, 22. but, under a pretence of meet- " ing for the celebration of the Lord's *ſupper*, they

" uſed the church of God as if it was an *eating* or *tip-*
" *pling* houſe; ſome of them revelling it there to that
" degree, that they went away *drunk* from theſe reli-
" gious aſſemblies. All this appears from the text.
" But I hope none among us (eſpecially none of thoſe
" who are ſo doubtful about their being duly qualified)
" do profane the ſacrament in this manner.

" But farther: Perhaps the *damnation* which St.
" Paul here denounces, is not ſo frightful as is com-
" monly apprehended; for all that he ſaith (if either
" the original or the margin of our Engliſh bibles be
" conſulted) will appear to be this, *He that eateth and*
" *drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment*
" *to himſelf.* Meaning hereby, in all probability,
" that he who doth thus affront our Lord's inſtitu-
" tion, by making no diſtinction between the bread
" of the ſacrament and common meat, doth by this
" his profaneneſs draw ſevere judgments of God upon
" himſelf: For, *for this cauſe* (ſaith he) *many are*
" *weak and ſickly among you, and many are fallen aſleep*,
" ver. 30. but here is not a word of everlaſting dam-
" nation, much leſs of any man's being put into that
" ſtate by thus receiving unworthily: unleſs any man
" will ſay, that all thoſe who are viſited wieh God's
" judgments in this world, are in the ſtate of damna-
" tion as to the next: which is ſo far from being true,
" that St. Paul, in this very place, affirms the contra-
" ry, *viz.* in the 32d verſe, where he tells us, That
" *when we are thus judged* [in this world] *we are*
" *chaſtened of the* Lord, *that we ſhould not be condemned*
" *with the world, i. e.* with wicked men in another
" life.

" But farther. Admitting St. Paul in theſe words
" to mean damnation in the uſual ſenſe, yet ſtill the
" utmoſt

" utmoſt they can come to, will be no more than " this; That *whoſoever eateth and drinketh* thus *un-* " *worthily*, as the *Corinthians* did, *is guilty of a dam-* " *nable ſin*. But now there are a great many other " caſes, beſides this of the ſacrament, in which a man " is equally guilty of a damnable ſin, if he do not per- " form his duty as he ought to do: he that prays or " hears unworthily; he that faſts or gives alms un- " worthily; in a word, he that in any inſtance per- " forms the worſhip of God, or profeſſeth the chriſti- " an religion unworthily; I ſay, ſuch a man, accord- " ing to the proteſtant doctrine, may be ſaid to do " theſe things to his own damnation, upon the ſame " account that he is ſaid to eat and drink his own " damnation, that communicates unworthily in the " ſacrament, tho' indeed not in ſo high a degree: that " is to ſay, ſuch a man is guilty of a ſin that is in its " own nature damnable, and may prove actually ſo to " him, unleſs either by a particular or general repent- " ance he obtains God's pardon for it. But yet, for " all this, there is no man will for theſe reaſons think " it adviſeable to leave off the practice of theſe duties; " but the only conſequence he will draw from hence " is, that he is ſo much the more concerned to take " care that he perform them as he ought to do.

" But, in the laſt place, let the ſin of coming to " the ſacrament unworthily be as great and as damna- " ble as we reaſonably can ſuppoſe it, yet this is that " we contend for, the ſin of totally withdrawing from " it, is much greater, and more damnable: ſo that if " he who partakes of it *unworthily*, doth *eat and drink* " *damnation to himſelf*; he that partakes not at all, is " ſo far from mending the matter, that he doth much " increaſe that damnation.

" The truth of this doth fully appear from what I " have before spoke in general, concerning the much " greater sin of transgressing a known law of God, " than of observing that law as well as we can, tho' " with much unworthiness. I will only add this far- " ther, with reference to this particular of receiving " the sacrament.

" Tho' I am far from encouraging any to approach " to the Lord's table without due qualifications; or " from extenuating any man's sin that comes unwor- " thily (unworthily I mean in the scripture sense of " that word, and not as it is understood by many me- " lancholy scrupulous persons) yet this I say, that if " men did seriously consider what a sin it is to live " without the sacrament, it being no other than liv- " ing in an open affront to the express institution of " our Lord Jesus, and a renouncing the worship of " God and the communion of the church, in the great " instance of christian worship and christian commu- " nion; and withal, the dreadful consequences they " bring upon themselves hereby, even the depriving " themselves of the chief of those ordinary means, " which our Lord hath appointed for the obtaining " remission of sins, and the grace and influence of his " Holy Spirit: I say, if men did seriously consider " these things, they would not look upon it as so slight " a matter, voluntarily to excommunicate themselves " as to the partaking in this great duty and privilege of " christians; but what apprehensions soever they had " of the sin, and the danger of receiving unworthily, " they would, for all that, think it more sinful and " more dangerous not to receive at all.

" I have said enough in answer to this objection " from St. Paul; perhaps too much, considering how

" often

" often theſe things have been ſaid: I will now go on
" with our caſe.

" In the third place therefore, let us ſuppoſe our
" doubting man (for theſe or ſuch like reaſons as we
" have given) to have ſuch a ſenſe of his duty, that he
" generally takes the opportunities that are offered him
" of doing honour to our Lord by partaking in his ſup-
" per, tho' perhaps he is not often very well ſatisfied
" about his preparation: but ſo it happens, that, ſince
" his laſt communicating, he finds his mind in a much
" worſe frame than it uſed to be: he hath lived more
" looſely and careleſly than he was wont; or perhaps
" he hath been very lately guilty of ſome grievous ſin
" that lies heavy upon his conſcience; ſo that when
" his next uſual time of receiving comes, he cannot
" but apprehend himſelf in a very unfit condition to
" communicate in ſo ſacred a myſtery. Upon this he
" is in a great perplexity what to do: for on the one
" ſide he thinks he hath more reaſon to believe that he
" offends God, if he comes to the ſacrament in theſe
" circumſtances, than if he forbears; becauſe he is
" more certain that there i sa law of God that forbids
" him to come unworthily, than he is certain that
" there is a law of God that commands him to receive
" every time that he hath opportunity. But now, on
" the other hand, if it ſhould prove that he is really
" bound by God's law to commemorate the death of
" Chriſt in the ſacrament every time that an opportu-
" nity is offered, he is ſenſible, in that caſe, it is a
" greater ſin to neglect this duty, than to perform it
" unworthily, ſo long ſtill as he performs it out of
" conſcience. What now is the man to do in theſe
" circumſtances?

" This is an exact inſtance of the caſe I ſpoke to in " my third propoſition, where on one ſide the man " runs a greater danger of ſinning; but on the other " ſide, if he ſhould prove miſtaken, he ſins in a greater " degree.

" Now, for a reſolution of this caſe I ſay, That if " the queſtion be put concerning the man's abſenting " himſelf only once or twice from the communion, " in order to the exerciſe of repentance, and the put- " ting himſelf into a better frame of mind againſt an- " other opportunity; the anſwer according to our " third propoſition muſt be this, That it is very reaſon- " able thus to do.

" And there is good ground for this anſwer; for " certainly a man is more in danger of ſinning if he " receive unworthily, than if he do not receive every " time that there is a communion; there being an ex- " preſs law againſt the one, but no expreſs law ob- " liging to the other: for Chriſt hath no more ap- " pointed that we ſhould receive the ſacrament ſo ma- " ny times in a year, than he hath appointed that we " ſhould pray ſo many times in a day; or, that we " ſhould give ſuch a determinate proportion of our " annual income to charitable uſes. As to theſe things, " he hath bound us in the general; but as to the par- " ticulars, the circumſtances of our condition, and the " laws of our ſuperiors, are to determine us: only this " we are to remember, that the oftener we perform " theſe duties it is the better; and we can hardly be " ſaid to be chriſtians, if we do not perform them fre- " quently.

" This now being ſo; tho' it be true, that a man " would be guilty of a greater ſin if he ſhould at any " time, tho' but once, abſtain from the communion,

" than

" than if he ſhould come to it with ſuch unworthineſs
" as we are here ſpeaking of; ſuppoſing that Chriſt's
" law had preciſely tied him up to communicate every
" time that a communion is appointed; yet ſince there
" is ſo little appearance of reaſon to conclude that
" Chriſt has thus tied him up; and withal, on the o-
" ther hand, he runs ſo certain a danger of ſinning,
" if he ſhould communicate at this time, apprehend-
" ing himſelf to be ſo unworthy as he doth: this con-
" ſideration of the certain danger muſt needs, in this
" caſe, over-balance the other of the greater ſin, and
" make it appear more reaſonable to the man to ſu-
" ſpend his receiving to another opportunity, againſt
" which time he hopes to be better prepared, than to
" adventure upon it in his preſent circumſtances.

" But then, if the queſtion be put concerning the
" man's abſenting himſelf cuſtomarily and habitually
" from the Lord's table upon this account of unwor-
" thineſs, that which I have now ſaid, will not hold;
" for, in this caſe, the man is in as much danger of
" ſinning by not receiving at all, as by receiving un-
" worthily; nay, and a great deal more, as I ſhewed
" in my firſt particular about this caſe: and withal,
" he is guilty of a much greater ſin in wholly with-
" drawing from the ſacrament, than in coming to it,
" tho' with never ſo great apprehenſions of his own
" unworthineſs; as I ſhewed in my ſecond. And
" therefore, ſince the danger is at leaſt equal on both
" ſides, he muſt chuſe that ſide, on which the leaſt ſin
" lies: that is to ſay, he muſt communicate frequent-
" ly (at leaſt ſo often as the laws of the church do
" enjoin him, which is three times a year) tho' he be
" in danger of doing it unworthily, rather than not
" communicate at all.

" Having thus gone thro' three of our propoſitions " concerning a double doubt; all that remains is, to " put our caſe about the ſacrament ſo, as that it may " ſerve for an inſtance or illuſtration of our fourth and " laſt.

" Here therefore we are to ſuppoſe our doubting " man to be in ſuch a condition, that he apprehends " he runs an equal danger of ſinning, whether he re- " ceives the ſacrament, or receives it not. And " withal ſo unſkilful a judge is he of the morality of " actions, that he apprehends no great difference in " the degree of the ſin, whether he do the one or the " other.

" In this caſe now all the man can do, is, to con- " ſider what inducements he has, in point of prudence " or intereſt, to do or to forbear the action he doubts " about; for ſince all other conſiderations in the caſe " are equal, thoſe of this kind are to turn the balance, " according to our fourth propoſition.

" But if the caſe turn upon this point, I dare ſay " no man will be long doubtful, whether he ſhould " frequent the ſacrament in obedience to the laws, or " forbear it; for it is plain, that he acts more pru- " dently, and more conſults his own advantage, both " temporal and ſpiritual, by doing the former.

" As for the temporal advantages which a man re- " ceives by obeying the laws in this matter, I will not " now inſiſt on them, tho' they are neither few nor " inconſiderable: that which I deſire chiefly to be here " conſidered, is this; that in point of ſpiritual advan- " tages it is much more adviſeable for our doubting " perſon to come to the ſacrament, than to abſtain " from it: for, by frequenting this ordinance, he takes " the beſt method, both to grow more worthy, if he

" be

" be now unworthy, and likewiſe to cure the doubts " and ſcruples he is now troubled with. But if he " neglects this means of grace, he not only takes an " effectual courſe to increaſe and perpetuate his fears " and doubts (it being very probable that the longer " he defers his receiving the ſacrament, ſtill the more " doubtful will he be of his being qualified for it) but " alſo is in great danger to loſe that ſenſe of virtue and " religion that he now hath upon his ſpirit, becauſe he " denies himſelf the uſe of thoſe means and helps which " are moſt principally neceſſary for the preſerving and " maintaining it.

" Now, I ſay, ſuppoſing all other things in the caſe " equal, this very conſideration alone will prevail with " a reaſonable man to come to the ſacrament, rather " than forbear it; even at the ſame time that he " mightly doubts whether he ſhall not receive un- " worthily.

" Thus have I given a large exemplification of all our " rules concerning a double doubt, in this inſtance of " receiving the holy communion. If I have dwelt too " long upon this ſubject, I hope the frequency and " the importance of the caſe will in ſome meaſure ex- " cuſe me."

III. Having thus prepared our way, by ſettling the notion and the rule of a doubting conſcience, I come now more directly to the main buſineſs that is before us, and that is, to give an account what ſhare human laws, eccleſiaſtical or civil, have in the rule of a doubting conſcience; or what power they have to over-rule a man's doubts in any caſe: which, according to the method I propoſed, is the third general enquiry I am to reſolve.

This is indeed the great point that is diſputed between us and thoſe of the ſeparation: nay, I may ſay, it is the point, upon which that whole controverſy turns, ſo far as a doubting conſcience is concerned in it; and therefore I ſhall diſcuſs it as carefully as I can, but yet in ſuch a general way, as that what I have to offer may ſerve for all other doubtful caſes of this nature, as well as this which we are now concerned in.

Their aſſertion generally is this (generally, I ſay; for there are ſome of the diſſenters, and thoſe as learned and eminent as any, who have declared themſelves of another opinion) *viz.* That wherever a man doubts concerning the lawfulneſs of an action, that very doubt of his is a ſufficient reaſon to make him forbear that action, tho' lawful authority hath commanded it.

On the other ſide our aſſertion is, that wherever lawful authority hath commanded an action, that command is (generally ſpeaking) a ſufficient warrant for a man to do that action, though he doubts whether in itſelf it be lawful or no.

That I may ſpeak clearly to this point, I ſhall firſt premiſe ſome things, in order to our more diſtinct underſtanding the ſtate of the queſtion. Secondly, I ſhall ſhew the grounds and reaſons of our aſſertion. Thirdly, I ſhall endeavour to anſwer the chief arguments that are brought on the other ſide.

1. What I think needful to be premiſed for the right apprehending the ſtate of the queſtion, I ſhall comprize in theſe following particulars; by which it may be eaſily diſcerned how far we agree with the diſſenters in this matter, and in what we differ from them:

Firſt, We do readily own with them, that no authority upon earth can oblige its ſubjects to do any action which the law of God hath forbidden, or to forbear

forbear any action which the law of God hath commanded.

Secondly, We agree likewise with them in this; that wherever any subject hath taken up an opinion or persuasion that such an action which his governors have obliged him to, is against the law of God; tho' it be a false opinion or persuasion, yet it will so far bind him, that he cannot in that instance obey their laws without offending God. But then we say, on the other hand, that tho' he cannot obey without sin, so long as this persuasion continues, yet he is at the same time guilty of sin in disobeying, if he should prove to be mistaken, supposing that it was thro' his own fault that he fell into that mistake.

Thirdly, We acknowledge farther, that in a case where a man cannot be said to be persuaded, that the particular action enjoined by authority is a sinful action, but only he doubts whether it be so or no; yet if the man hath a general persuasion that no public law will warrant him to act against his private doubts; in this case he can no more do the action enjoined without sin, than he could in the former case. But then, if this notion of his be false (as it is my present business to shew that it is so) he cannot be excused from sin in disobeying his superiors, unless upon the former account of inculpable ignorance.

Fourthly, We say this farther, that a culpable doubt doth no more excuse the doing an evil action, than a culpable ignorance; *i. e.* it doth not excuse it. My meaning is this: if a man should be so little instructed in his religion, as to doubt whether that which is plainly enjoined by God's law be a duty or no: or, whether that which is plainly forbid by God's law be a sin or no (so plainly, I mean, that it is the duty of every honest

honeſt man to know this, and he muſt be moſt criminally ignorant, that can be ſo ſtupid as to make a doubt of it) if, I ſay, in ſuch a caſe as this, a man ſhould doubt whether the thing commanded by his ſuperiors was lawful or no; we are ſo far from ſaying, that a man doth well in obeying his ſuperiors, in ſuch an inſtance where their commands do ſo manifeſtly contradict the laws of God, that on the contrary we affirm, the man is highly accountable to God for all ſuch actions that he doth, tho' they were done purely in obedience to that authority which God hath ſet over him; and purely in compliance with this principle we are now contending for, *viz.* That in all doubtful caſes, it is moſt reaſonable to govern our actions by the commands of our ſuperiors.

Far are we therefore from aſſerting, that whatever our governors do command, the ſubject is bound to perform, ſo long as he only doubts, but is not perſuaded of the unlawfulneſs of the thing commanded; and that, if there be any ſin in the action, he that commands it, is to anſwer for it, and not he that obeys: for we do believe, that in matters where a man's conſcience is concerned, every one is to be a judge for himſelf, and muſt anſwer for himſelf. And therefore, if our ſuperiors do command us to do an action which their ſuperior, God Almighty, hath forbid; we are offenders if we do that action, as well as they in commanding it, and that whether we do it doubtingly, or with a perſuaſion of its lawfulneſs.

But then theſe two things are always to be remembered; firſt, That this is true only in ſuch caſes where (as I ſaid) a man is bound to know that God's law hath forbid that action which his governors do command, and it is either through his groſs careleſsneſs, or ſome other

other worſe principle in him, that he knows it not, or is doubtful of it. For wherever a man is innocently and inculpably ignorant or doubtful, how the law of God ſtands as to ſuch a particular matter, which authority hath obliged him to; as having neither means to come to the knowledge of it; or if he had, the circumſtances of his condition not requiring that he ſhould ſo accurately inform himſelf about it: in ſuch a caſe as this, I ſay, a man cannot formally be ſaid to be guilty of ſin in obeying his lawful ſuperiors, though the inſtance in which he obeys, ſhould happen to contradict ſome law of God. For the law of God here is as no law to him, that is, it doth not oblige him, becauſe he neither knows it, nor is bound to know it. And *where there is no law, there is no tranſgreſſion.*

And then, farther, this is alſo to be remembered, that when we own that a man may be guilty of ſin, as well in obeying his ſuperior, when he only doubts of the lawfulneſs of the action commanded, as when he is perſuaded that the action is unlawful: I ſay, this we are to remember, that whenever this caſe happens, the man's ſin doth not lie in his obeying his ſuperiors with a doubting conſcience (which is commonly run away with;) for the man would as certainly ſin, if in this caſe he did the action with a perſuaſion that it was lawful; as he doth in doing it with a doubt, whether it be lawful or no: but the ſin lies here, *viz.* in doing an action which God's law hath forbid; and which the man would have known to be an ill action, if he had been ſo honeſt, and ſo careful in minding his duty as he ſhould have been. It is his acting contrary to a law of God, that here makes the matter of the ſin; and it is his vicious criminal ignorance of that law which gives the form to it. But as for the obeying his ſuperiors, whether

whether with a doubt or without one, that is no part or ingredient of the sin at all.

Fifthly, We add this farther, that whatever power or right we give to our superiors, for the over-ruling a private doubt; it is not to be extended so far as either to destroy the truth, or to supersede the use of those rules I have before laid down in order to the directing a man's proceeding in the case of a double doubt. For this case of obeying the commands of our superiors, when we doubt of the lawfulness of them, being a double doubt as properly as any other, those rules are here to take place as much as in any other instance.

And therefore wherever a man's doubts are in this case very unequal: that is to say, he apprehends himself in much greater danger of sinning if he obey his superiors in this particular instance, than if he obey them not; as having abundantly more reason to believe that their commands are unlawful, than that they are lawful: in that case we cannot say, he is obliged to obey, but should rather disobey, supposing all other considerations to be equal: for no man is bound to obey his superiors any farther than they command lawful things. And therefore if it be two to one more probable that their command is unlawful than that it is lawful, it is likewise more probable that a man in this instance is not to obey them. And a greater probability, *cæteris paribus*, is always to be chosen before a less, according to our first rule.

But then, though the authority of our superiors alone will not in this case be of force enough to retrieve the balance which is so far inclined the other way, and to turn it on its own side; yet there may be, and very usually are, such other arguments drawn from the consideration of the greater sin, and the more dreadful con-

ſequences, of diſobeying in this inſtance, than of obeying; as will to any reaſonable man outweigh all the probabilities on the other ſide (ſo long as they are not ſo great as to create a perſuaſion) and make it reaſonable for the man rather to do the action, how ſtrong ſoever his doubts be of the unlawfulneſs of it (ſo long as they are but doubts) than to omit it after lawful authority hath enjoined it.

But however this happen; it is always to be borne in mind, as before, that if it ſhould prove that our ſuperiors do command nothing in the particular inſtances, but what they lawfully may do; it will not juſtify any man's diſobedience, to ſay, that he apprehended it was more dangerous or more ſinful to obey them, than to diſobey them: for our miſtakes and falſe reaſonings, will not take off from the obligation that is upon us to obey our lawful ſuperiors in their lawful commands; unleſs, as I have often ſaid, we can ſatisfy ourſelves, that in thoſe inſtances we neither were bound, nor had ſufficient means to underſtand better.

And now having thus cleared our way, by removing from our queſtion thoſe things that are foreign to it, and which indeed, by being uſually blended with it, have made it more intricate than otherwiſe it would be, we are pretty well prepared to propoſe our point.

In the ſixth place then, excluding (as we have done) out of our caſe all thoſe things and circumſtances we have been ſpeaking of, with none of which we have here to do; the plain queſtion before us is this:

Whether in the caſe of a pure doubt about the lawfulneſs or unlawfulneſs of an action, where the probabilities are on both ſides pretty equal, and where likewiſe the man concerned hath done all that he was obliged to do for the ſatisfying himſelf: whether, I ſay,

in

in this case the command of a lawful superior ought not so far to over-balance the doubt, as not only to make it reasonable for the man to do that, of which he doubteth: but also to oblige him so to do.

We hold the affirmative of this question; and I now come to give the reasons why we so hold, which is the second thing to be done under this head.

2. Our proposition is this, That if lawful authority do command us to do a thing, which as on the one hand, we cannot say it is lawful; so on the other hand, we cannot say it is unlawful; but our judgment remains suspended, as having equal, or near equal arguments on both sides: in such a case as this, though if we were left to our own choice, we should generally forbear the action for the reasons I before gave; yet being commanded by our superiors, who by the law of God have authority over us; it is not only reasonable, but our duty to do it.

For first of all, even in point of humility and modesty, though there was no other consideration; one would think that a subject owes as much deference to the judgment and discretion of his superiors as this comes to.

So much influence as this, even a confessor or a private friend hath over our consciences. In a case where we are altogether uncertain on both sides, we usually so far submit ourselves to them, as to be swayed and over-ruled by what they advise; and that oftentimes not so much upon consideration of the weight and force of their reasons, as merely upon this account, that we take them to be abler to guide us in these affairs than we ourselves are, as having better considered them, and seeing farther into them than we do.

I dare ſay there are few of thoſe we are now diſputing with, if a doubt ſhould happen to ariſe in their conſcience about the lawfulneſs of any practice in their trade, or their other civil concernments, and they ſhould upon this apply to ſome friend of theirs, of whoſe learning and prudence and honeſty they have a good opinion, and put their caſe to him; but would (if the doubt was ſo equal on both ſides as in our caſe we ſuppoſe it) without any great difficulty be concluded and determined by the judgment of the man they thus apply to; eſpecially if that judgment be ſeconded by the ſuffrage of ſome other learned pious men, whom they have thought fit upon this occaſion to conſult likewiſe.

If now the opinions of one or two private men be of ſo much weight as to over-rule a doubt about the lawfulneſs of an action, when the reaſons on both ſides are equal; is it not very hard if the joint reſolution and determination of our public governors, whoſe office and buſineſs it is to conſult and command for the beſt, ſhould not in ſuch a caſe have the ſame influence upon the minds of their own ſubjects? Or would it not argue much ſelf-conceit and arrogance, and a very mean opinion of our ſuperiors, and a great contempt of their authority, to refuſe that reſpect to them which we give to every private man almoſt that we think wiſer than ourſelves?

Secondly, I deſire that may be taken notice of, which the caſuiſts, and in particular our excellent biſhop *Sanderſon*, have urged in this affair, *viz.* It is a known rule in law, "That in all diſputed caſes, he "that is in poſſeſſion of the thing contended for, hath "the advantage of the other that contends with him, "ſuppoſing all other things be equal." In controverted

verted matters, the right is always presumed to be on the side of the possessor, unless there be a good reason shewn to the contrary.

Thus for instance, if I be in possession of an estate which another man makes a claim to, and it is equally doubtful whether that estate belongs to him or me; yet so long as I have the possession of it, I have a good title to it by the laws of God and man; nor can I without injustice be dispossessed of it, till my adversary hath made it appear that he hath a better title to it than I.

Let us now apply this rule to our present case. Here is a contest or dispute between the superior and the subject, about the matter of right as to a particular action. The superior saith, it is his right to command his subject in this instance, and accordingly doth command him. The subject saith, that he doubts whether his superior hath right to command him in this instance, because he doubts whether this command be not against the law of God.

But in the mean time the superior is in actual possession of the power and authority to command, though it be uncertain and doubtful whether as to this instance he do not exceed the just limits of his power.

Why, certainly by the former rule, so long as the case is thus doubtful, the subject must yield; and at no hand by his disobedience dispossess his superior of that authority he is possessed of, till he be convinced in his own conscience that he hath greater reason to disobey in this instance than to obey; which in our case it is impossible he should have, because we here suppose that the reasons on both sides are equal.

But, Thirdly, If this argument appear too subtle; let the question before us be decided by the common rule, *viz.* That in all doubtful cases the safer side is to be chosen. Now

Now putting the point upon this iſſue I aſk, Which is ſafeſt, with reſpect to conſcience, for a man to obey his ſuperiors in ſuch a purely doubtful caſe as we here ſpeak of; or to diſobey them? I think this queſtion will ſoon be anſwered by any man that will attend to what I am going to repreſent, *viz.*

There is a plain law of God, and acknowledged by us to be ſo, that commands us to obey our ſuperiors in all lawful things: but as to the particular caſe, about which we are now ſuppoſed to doubt, it is very uncertain and queſtionable to us (even after our beſt endeavours to ſatisfy ourſelves) whether there be any law of God which forbiddeth that thing which our ſuperiors have enjoined us.

This now being ſo, we thus argue: If it ſhould prove that our ſuperiors do in this inſtance command an unlawful thing; yet the hazard we run in obeying them is very ſmall and inconſiderable, in compariſon with that we run in diſobeying them, ſuppoſing it ſhould indeed prove that they command nothing but what is juſt and right, and conducing to the public good.

For by doing the former, by obeying our ſuperiors, the only hazard we run, is of tranſgreſſing ſome unknown law of God; ſome law which doth no way appear to us; all that we can pronounce after our beſt enquiry being no more than this, that it may be, there is ſuch a law, and it may be, there is not: and therefore we may reaſonably preſume, that if there ſhould indeed be ſuch a law of God; it is either not of ſuch conſequence that we in our circumſtances were bound to know it; or if it was, that we had no ſufficient means to come to the knowledge of it; in each of which caſes, as I ſaid, a man's ignorance doth excuſe the violation of the law.

But

But now, on the other ſide, if, in ſuch an inſtance as this, we diſobey authority when it hath peremptorily laid its commands upon us; we venture upon a much greater danger. For in that caſe we run the hazard of tranſgreſſing a plain law of God; a law, of which no man can or ought to be ſuppoſed ignorant; and withal, a law it is of ſuch importance and conſequence to mankind, that we may truly ſay, the very being, as well as the happineſs of all ſocieties depend upon it.

Suppoſing now this to be a true account of the hazard we run in acting on one ſide or the other in our preſent queſtion, I leave it to any indifferent perſon to judge, whether it be not much ſafer in ſuch circumſtances as we here ſpeak of, to obey our lawful ſuperiors with a doubting conſcience, than to diſobey them with a doubting conſcience.

Fourthly, If there yet remain any diſpute in this matter, let, if you pleaſe, our Saviour's rule determine it, *As ye would that men ſhould do unto you, even ſo do ye unto them.* We deſire no more favour for our ſuperiors, than this eternal law of equity will oblige us to.

If a man will but be ſo impartial, as to paſs the ſame judgment in the cauſe of authority when he is a ſubject, as he doth in his own cauſe when he is a ſuperior, we believe there would be preſently an end of this controverſy.

For let men talk as gravely as they pleaſe about the danger of obeying the public laws with a doubting conſcience; yet I dare appeal to themſelves, whether they would not think it very unreaſonable for any domeſtic of theirs, over whom they have lawful authority, to live in contradiction to the private rules and orders of their family, upon a pretence of doubting whether thoſe orders were lawful or no.

If

If a parent, for inſtance, ſhould command his ſon to ſit uncovered before him; he would not take it for a good anſwer from the young man, to ſay, Sir, I am doubtful whether it be not unlawful to uſe any ſuch ceremonies to men, and therefore I pray excuſe me, if I do not pay you that reſpect you require.

If a maſter ſhould order his ſervant to provide a dinner for him on the Lord's day; and he ſhould reply, I would do it, with all my heart, but that I am in doubt whether it be not forbidden by God's word to do any work on the ſabbath. I am not indeed perſuaded that it is forbidden, but in the mean time I am not ſatisfied that it is lawful, and therefore till I be reſolved in this point, I pray, Sir, be pleaſed to pardon me.

Would now a parent or a maſter think theſe anſwers reaſonable? Would he take them in ſuch good part, as to think his ſon or his ſervant had done nothing but what they were bound to do in thus refuſing to obey his commands? No, I dare ſay he would not; but on the contrary would tell them, you are my ſon or my ſervant, and you muſt leave it to me to judge what is fit for me to command, and for you to do; I will take care to command you nothing but what is lawful and juſtifiable: but in the mean time, you muſt not think by your fooliſh doubts and ſcruples (ſo long as you confeſs you know nothing unlawful in what I bid you do) to controul my orders and commands; that I think neither becomes you to do, nor me to ſuffer.

I dare ſay moſt men would judge this a very fitting and juſt reply in ſuch a caſe. And if ſo, it is a ſtrong argument that we are all naturally apt to think that, in purely doubtful caſes, our ſuperior is to be obeyed notwithſtanding our doubt; and that if in any caſe we

think otherwiſe, it is where our own liberty and intereſt are concerned, and where conſequently we may be juſtly preſumed unequal judges, as being prejudiced in favour of ourſelves.

Fifthly, Let me add this one conſideration more, and I have done. If in meerly doubtful caſes, our ſuperiors have not a power of determining us; what will their authority ſignify? If it be not of weight enough when the ſcales hang even to turn the balance, it is truly the lighteſt thing in the world; indeed it is worth nothing; and there will not be left power enough in thoſe that are to govern us, for the ſecuring in any tolerable degree the peace and happineſs of the ſociety they are to govern.

For I pray conſider, What can there be ſo wiſely commanded, or provided for, either in a family, in a city, or in a kingdom, but may be liable to exception, and become a matter of doubt to ſome perſon or other?

There is nothing in the whole compaſs of indifferent things (and ſuch chiefly are the matters of human laws) but ſome perſon or other will be found to doubt whether it be fit or lawful. And if ſuch a doubt be a juſt reaſon to deny obedience to the law or the command, in what a condition are all families, and corporations, and ſocieties in the world? What will be the conſequence of ſuch a principle? Why certainly nothing but perpetual jars, and diſturbances, and confuſions.

For inſtance, if whenever a prince declares war againſt his enemies, it ſhould be ſuppoſed lawful for any ſubject to withdraw his aſſiſtance from his ſovereign, in caſe he doubts whether that war be a lawful war or no; in what a ſad caſe would that prince or that kingdom be, that is to be ſupported and protected upon

theſe terms? Every man is hereby made a judge of the merits of a war; and tho' he be never ſo ignorant, never ſo unexperienced, never ſo unable to make a judgment of theſe momentous affairs of the kingdom; yet if ſome rumours or uncertain ſtories have reached his ears, that make him doubt whether this war was lawfully begun or no; why, he is upon this principle warranted to deny not only his perſonal ſervice, but his contributions towards the charge of that war. But theſe conſequences are intolerable; and therefore the principle from whence they flow, muſt needs be thought intolerable alſo.

3. Having thus given the reaſons of our aſſertion, I come now in the third place to anſwer the arguments that are brought on the other ſide.

All the arguments I have met with againſt the doctrine we have been eſtabliſhing, may be reduced to three; and of thoſe three, the firſt I have prevented by my ſtating the queſtion; the ſecond I have already anſwered in my proofs of our aſſertion; ſo that the third only remains to be ſpoken to. However I will name the two firſt.

The firſt argument is drawn from the miſchievous conſequences of our doctrine. For, ſay they, if a man ſhould think himſelf obliged in every doubtful caſe to be determined by the command of his ſuperiors, it would be the ready way to involve him oftentimes in moſt grievous ſins. As for inſtance, if a man ſhould ſo halt between two opinions, as to doubt whether Jehovah or Baal was the true God, as the Iſraelites ſometimes did; and at the ſame time (as it then happened among them) the chief ruler ſhould command, that Baal ſhould be worſhipped: why now in this caſe (ſay they) according to your way of reſolving doubts, the man

man muſt be obliged to worſhip an idol, and to renounce the true God.

This is the argument. But it is no argument againſt us: becauſe in the ſtating of our queſtion, we have excluded all ſuch doubts out of it, as do proceed from a man's groſs and criminal ignorance of his duty (as it is apparent and notorious that the doubt in this inſtance doth.) On the contrary, we are as forward to acknowledge as they, that if any man do an action that is plainly contradictory to the laws of God, it is not his ignorance, and much leſs his doubtfulneſs, that will excuſe him, though he do it in obedience to his governors. So that though this argument would fall heavy enough upon thoſe that plead for an abſolute blind obedience to authority in all things indiſcriminately (which no man of the church of England doth) yet it doth not at all touch us, who only aſſert, That where we doubt equally, whether an action be lawful or no, and have uſed our beſt endeavours to ſatisfy ourſelves how the law of God ſtands as to that matter, there the command of our ſuperiors is to over-rule our doubt.

But farther, to ſhew what little force there is in this argument, which indeed hath made a great deal of noiſe; we will try whether it will not make as much againſt our adverſaries, if they will give us leave to put the caſe, as it ſeems to make againſt us, when they put the caſe.

Let us ſuppoſe therefore, as before, that an Iſraelite was very doubtful, whether Jehovah or Baal was the true God: and let us ſuppoſe likewiſe (as we reaſonably may) that the king of Iſrael made a law, that all the temples and altars of Baal ſhould be demoliſhed, and that Jehovah only ſhould be worſhipped: what

advice

advice now ſhould they give to the doubting man in this caſe? Would they ſay, that he muſt comply with the king's laws, and worſhip Jehovah only, while yet he is doubtful in his own mind whether Baal be not the true God? Why, this is againſt their own principle, and gives away the cauſe to us. But will they then ſay, that while this doubt remains, the man muſt not obey authority in worſhipping Jehovah only, but he muſt either worſhip Baal, and not Jehovah, or both Baal and Jehovah together? Why, this is indeed agreeable to their principle; but then I appeal to my reader, whether, according to their way of reſolving of doubts, a man is not as neceſſarily engaged in idolatry, and other grievous ſins, as he is by our way.

So that you ſee this argument concludes as ſtrongly againſt them as againſt us. But in truth it concludes nothing either one way or other, but is wholly foreign to the queſtion; as I ſhewed in my ſtating of it, whither I refer the reader.

The ſecond argument is drawn from the limitations which God himſelf hath put to the obedience we are to pay to our governors; and it may be formed thus: God hath not commanded us to obey our ſuperiors abſolutely, and in all things, but only in all ſuch things as are not contrary to his law: ſo that wherever we are uncertain whether the commands of our ſuperior be lawful or no, we muſt at the ſame time be as much uncertain whether we be bound to obey: and, if ſo, how can you ſay that it is any more our duty to obey them, than to diſobey them in a doubtful caſe?

To this we anſwer, That tho' we acknowledge that no man is bound to obey his ſuperiors any farther than they command lawful things; yet, whenever it happens that they command ſuch things as we equally

doubt whether they be lawful or no, there are ſo many weighty reaſons to be given why a man ſhould obey rather than diſobey in that caſe, as will perſuade any wiſe and good man to think it his duty to obey. And for thoſe reaſons I refer my reader to the five particulars I before inſiſted on.

The third, and indeed the principal argument is drawn from the words of St. Paul, in the xivth of the *Romans*, and laſt verſe; *He that doubteth is damned if he eat, becauſe he eateth not of faith; and whatſoever is not of faith is ſin.* From whence they thus argue: if it was a ſin in thoſe chriſtians that St. Paul ſpeaks of, to eat any food, tho' in itſelf lawful to be eaten, ſo long as they doubted whether it was lawful or no; then, by parity of reaſon, it muſt be a ſin to do any other action, ſo long as we have a doubt in our minds concerning the lawfulneſs of it; and if ſo, it is not the magiſtrate's commanding that action that will make it ceaſe to be a ſin in us to do it.

This is the great argument that is brought againſt our point, and I ſhall give it a full and a juſt diſcuſſion; becauſe, in truth, if we come clearly off from this text of St. Paul, not only all that is ſaid againſt obeying authority with a doubting conſcience will fall to the ground, but likewiſe moſt of the difficulties which entangle and perplex the caſe of a doubting conſcience in other matters, will be in a great meaſure removed.

But before I enter upon a particular diſcuſſion of this text, with reference to our preſent controverſy, it will be needful to premiſe ſome general account of it, for the ſake of ordinary readers; that ſo underſtanding beforehand the caſe which the apoſtle ſpeaks to, and the meaning of the expreſſions he here uſeth, they may be the better able to go along with us.

Firſt,

Firſt, therefore, I ſhall give an account of the ſubject-matter of St. Paul's diſcourſe in this chapter. II. Of what is meant by doubting in this text. III. What is meant by eating not of faith. IV. What is meant by being damned or condemned for ſo doing.

Firſt, As to the ſubject-matter of St. Paul's diſcourſe in this chapter, it is undoubtedly the caſe of thoſe Jewiſh chriſtians that were not ſo fully inſtructed in their chriſtian liberty, but that they ſtill believed all the ceremonial laws of Moſes concerning the obſervations of days, and difference of meats, to be ſtill in force, and to oblige their conſcience; or at leaſt they mightily doubted whether they did or not: ſo that whereas other chriſtians, who were better inſtructed, made no ſcruple of eating any kind of food, tho' forbidden by the law of Moſes; theſe men had great reaſon to forbear ſuch kind of meats, becauſe they were perſuaded, or at leaſt it appeared more probable to them than otherwiſe, that they were bound ſo to do.

That this was the caſe of thoſe that St. Paul here ſtyles the weak chriſtians, appears from ſeveral paſſages of this chapter, nor, I think, is it much queſtioned by any. As for what is intimated in the ſecond verſe, concerning their abſtaining from fleſh altogether, and only eating herbs; which would make one think that it was not purely their reſpect to the law of Moſes, but ſome other thing, which made them thus to put a difference between meats, becauſe by that law they were no more tied from fleſh (excepting only ſwines fleſh and a few other ſorts) than they were from herbs. St. Chryſoſtome hath well obviated this difficulty, in the account he gives of the caſe of thoſe chriſtians: "There were (ſaith he) ſeveral of the believing Jews, "who, taking themſelves to be obliged in conſcience

" by the law of Moſes, even after their chriſtianity, " did ſtill retain the obſervation of meats, not daring " wholly to throw off the yoke of the law: theſe " now, leſt they ſhould be found out, and reproached " by the other chriſtians for thus abſtaining from " ſwines fleſh, and the like, upon account of conſci- " ence, choſe to eat no fleſh at all, but to feed alto- " gether upon herbs, that ſo this way of living of " theirs might paſs rather for a kind of faſt, or religi- " ous abſtinence, than for a legal obſervance." Thus St. Chryſoſtome: and to the ſame purpoſe Theodoret and Theophylact.

But if any one be not ſatisfied with this account of that buſineſs, but will farther contend, That St. Paul here doth not only ſpeak to the caſe of Jewiſh chriſtians, who were zealous for Moſes's law, but alſo takes in the caſe of ſome Gentile chriſtians at that time, who (upon a Phythagorean principle they might have entertained) were averſe to the eating any kind of fleſh, as thinking all ſuch food to be unclean; they may, notwithſtanding what I have ſaid, enjoy their own opinion: for it is indifferent to our controverſy, whether the perſons, whoſe caſe is here ſpoken to, were Jews or Gentiles: only thus much appears plainly, that the moſt of them were Jewiſh chriſtians, who, together with their chriſtianity, had a conſcientious regard to the law of Moſes.

Secondly, As for what is meant by [*doubting*] in the text, the reader may be pleaſed to take notice that the word [διακρίνομενος*] which we here tranſlate [*He that doubteth*] doth as properly ſignify to diſtinguiſh, or make

* The word [διακρίνω] doth no where, either in ſcripture or any other author, ſignify to *doubt*, but moſt uſually to diſcern, or diſtinguiſh, or make a difference; as it is frequently

make a difference, as to doubt or hesitate. And thus it is used both by prophane writers, and in holy scripture; as particularly in the 22d verse of St. Jude's epistle, *And of some have compassion, making a difference,* [διακρινόμενοι] the very word in the text.

Now, considering the apostle's argument in this chapter is the case of the Jewish christians, who were divided in their persuasions about the legal observations, some making a difference between clean and unclean meats, and such like things, and others making none; it seems every whit as proper and natural, and more suitable to the scope of the place, to take the word in this sense in this place, rather than in that other, according to which it is usually translated: so that the text is thus to be rendered; he that maketh a differ-

 ence

frequently used in the new testament: *Vide* Mat. xvi 3. Acts xv. 9. 1 Cor. iv. 7. vi. 5. xi. 29, The word [διακρίνομαι] is sometimes taken actively, and then it hath the same signification with [διακρίνω] *i. e.* to make a difference. As is plain not only in St. Jude's text, here quoted, but in St. James, chap. ii. 4. where our English translation hath indeed very well rendered the apostle's sense thus, [Are ye not partial?] But if they had truly rendered his words, they must have thus translated [Do ye not make a difference?]

Again; sometimes it is taken passively, and then the signification of it is this, to be divided, or severed, or distinguished. And when it is used in this sense, it sometimes happens that the English word [*doubting*] doth conveniently enough express it; *doubting* being indeed nothing else but a man's being divided as to his own mind. And accordingly in some places our translators have thus englished it, tho' I believe in some of those, more proper words might be found out to express its sense. But tho' in a few texts it be thus used in scripture, yet I do not find that any prophane author did ever use it in this sense of *doubting*. And therefore, unless there be evident reason, I do not know why we should depart from the natural and usual signification of the world in the text we are now upon.

ence between clean and unclean meats, if he do eat any thing which he judgeth to be unclean, he is damned or condemned for ſo doing, becauſe he eateth not of faith.

And ſo probable is this rendring, that our Engliſh tranſlators took care to put it in the margin of our bibles; as may be ſeen by every one. Nor doth it want good authority; for the vulgar Latin thus tranſlates the place; and not only ſo, but Eraſmus, Hentenius, and generally all the Latin expoſitors, if we may believe Eſtius, who yet himſelf interprets it the common way.

Indeed I doubt not but this is the true verſion of this word in this text; however, I do not ſo much ſtand upon it, as to preclude any man from the liberty of taking the other, if he likes it better: for tho' this way of rendering doth better ſerve for our purpoſe (as quite putting an end to the controverſy) yet our cauſe doth not ſo abſolutely depend upon it, but that we may very well allow of the common tranſlation, as will appear hereafter.

Thirdly, As for the word faith, which is here uſed, let it be taken notice of, that when in the verſe before the text the apoſtle ſpeaks of having faith; and in the text, of eating without faith, or not of faith; and that, *whatſoever is not of faith is ſin:* we are not to take faith here in the large ſenſe, as it ſignifies a belief in Jeſus Chriſt, or an aſſent to God's revelations, particularly thoſe of the goſpel, which is the uſual notion of faith in the New-teſtament; but only for a man's aſſent to the goodneſs or lawfulneſs of any particular action that he takes in hand.

So that to have faith about an action, is to be perſuaded that that action may be lawfully done in the preſent circumſtances, or at leaſt not to be conſcious of any reaſon

reaſon that ſhould make it unlawful. And, on the other ſide, to do an action *without faith*, or *not of faith*, as the apoſtle here expreſſeth it, is to do an action, of the lawfulneſs of which we are no way ſatisfied, but, on the contrary, think we have good reaſon to believe that it is an unlawful action.

Fourthly, Whereas St. Paul ſaith, that *he that doubteth*, or differenceth, *is damned*, or condemned, *if he eat*; we are to take notice, that that expreſſion is not to be underſtood of the puniſhment of his eating, in the other world (which is that which in common ſpeech we call damnation) but only of the guilt of his eating as to his own conſcience. Indeed there is no colour why our tranſlators ſhould here uſe the word damned, ſince condemned is the natural word, whether we conſider the propriety of the Greek or the Engliſh language. So that this is the meaning of the propoſition; *He that doubteth* (with ſuch a doubt as is here ſpoken of) *and yet eateth*, ſuch a man is condemned for ſo doing. Condemned! how? why, condemned of himſelf (as the apoſtle had expreſſed it in the verſe before) condemned of his own conſcience; becauſe, without neceſſity, having free power over his own actions, he doth that which he apprehends to be ſinful.

I dare ſay, the reader will be ſatisfied of the truth of our interpretation as to both the laſt named particulars, if he will carefully read the foregoing verſe, together with the text (as indeed they do but both make one compleat ſentence) and judge of one by the other.

St. Paul hath for a good while been addreſſing himſelf to the ſtronger chriſtians, in order to the perſuading them ſo to uſe their knowledge and their chriſtian liberty, that they might edify the weak brethren among

them, but in no wiſe give ſcandal to any of them. And thus he concludes his advice in this chapter.

*Haſt thou faith? Have it to thyſelf before* God. *Happy is he that condemneth not himſelf in that thing which he alloweth: but he that doubteth* (or maketh a difference) *is condemned if he eat, becauſe he eateth not of faith; and whatſoever is not of faith, is ſin.*

I dare appeal to any indifferent perſon, that hath read St. Paul's foregoing diſcourſe in this chapter, whether the meaning of this whole paſſage be not to this effect:

Art thou ſo well inſtructed in thy religion, as to be perſuaded that the goſpel hath taken away all difference of meats, and that thou mayeſt lawfully eat of any food that is ſet before thee? Why, it is very well for thee; but then, be content that thou art thus perſuaded, and do not upon every occaſion make ſuch an oſtentation of thy faith in this matter, nor deſpiſe others that have it not, as to lay a ſnare before thy weak and uninſtructed brethren, who are of another perſuaſion, to ſin againſt their conſcience by acting as thou doſt. It is ſufficient for thee that God ſeeth thy faith, and that thou canſt juſtify thy eating to thy own conſcience; for, I can aſſure thee, it is no ſmall happineſs for a man to be able to ſatisfy his own conſcience in that action which he takes in hand.

[This is undoubtedly the meaning of that expreſſion, Happy is he that condemneth not himſelf in that thing which he approveth. That is, it is a great comfort to a man that his conſcience doth not condemn him in that action which he thinks fit to do. *In ea re quam agendum ſuſcipit*, ſaith Grotius; *In eo quod agendum elegit*, ſaith Eſtius: *En ce qu'il veut faire*, ſaith the late excellent French tranſlation. And it is juſt

the

the ſame thing that St. John ſaith in other words, 1 John iii. 21. *My brethren, if our own hearts (i. e.* our conſcience) *condemn us not, then have we confidence towards* God.]

But then (as the apoſtle goes on) as to thoſe that are ſo uninſtructed in the nature of chriſtianity, as ſtill to make a difference between clean and unclean meats; as it infinitely concerns them to have a care what they do, ſo it concerns thee likewiſe to have a care how thou layeſt a ſtumbling-block before them; for, in what a condition would any of them be, if, being tempted by thy inſolent carriage and unreaſonable example, he ſhould thro' fear or baſe compliance venture to eat ſuch things as he judgeth to be unclean? Why, certainly he is both an ill and a miſerable man for ſo doing, becauſe he is condemned of his own conſcience: for he eats, not only without being convinced of the lawfulneſs of his eating, but preſuming the contrary; and whatever is thus done againſt conſcience, muſt needs be a ſin. This I take to be the true meaning of this whole paſſage; for which, if need was, we might produce ſeveral authorities, particularly that of St. Chryſoſtome, who gives much the ſame account of it.

Having thus given an account of the text as it lies in the chapter, and with relation to the buſineſs that St. Paul had there in hand; I now come to conſider it with reference to our preſent controverſy with the diſſenters, and to take off the argument they bring from it againſt the poſition we are now contending for.

Their argument, as I ſaid, is this:

St. Paul here affirms, That whoſoever doubteth about the lawfulneſs of any particular meat, and while that doubt remaineth eateth of that meat, ſuch a man

ſins, and is condemned for ſo doing; becauſe he *eateth not of faith*. If now it be ſo in this particular caſe, it muſt be ſo in all other doubtful caſes; and conſequently in the caſe of obeying authority, where a man doubts of the lawfulneſs of the thing enjoined: that is to ſay, whoſoever, in any caſe whatſoever, doth an action, of the lawfulneſs of which he doubts, he ſins and is condemned for ſo doing, becauſe he acteth not of faith.

This is the argument fairly put, and I ſhall now endeavour as fairly to anſwer it.

And firſt of all I ſay, this argument proceeds upon a falſe ground; for it ſuppoſeth St. Paul, in this text, to ſpeak to the caſe of a purely doubting conſcience (which is the ſubject of our preſent controverſy) whereas it may be made to appear with good evidence, that it is the caſe of a reſolved conſcience only that he here treats of: ſo that this text is wholly miſapplied by the diſſenters, and makes nothing at all to the buſineſs. For tho' there be indeed in this text a very ſevere cenſure of all thoſe that act againſt any kind of perſuaſion, yet there is nothing here ſaid that toucheth a man's acting doubtingly, either one way or other.

That this is true, appears from the account I have before given of the ſubject-matter of the apoſtle's diſcourſe in this chapter; which is, the caſe of thoſe chriſtians who were not barely doubtful and wavering in their own minds, whether they might lawfully eat of ſuch meats as were then diſputed; but were perſuaded they ought not, as believing that the law of Moſes, which had declared them unclean, was ſtill in force; or elſe believing them to be unclean in themſelves.

That this was indeed the caſe here diſcuſs'd, ſeems very clear from the ſecond and fifth verſes of this chapter, where the apoſtle ſtates it; and more particularly from

from the 14th verſe, where he gives a ſummary reſolution of it, and in my judgment, the very ſame reſolution that he doth in the text: *I know* (ſaith he) *and am perſuaded, that there is nothing unclean of itſelf; but to him that eſteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.* So that it ſeems the perſon, whoſe caſe St. Paul ſpeaks to, was not uncertain or unreſolved, whether the meats under deliberation were clean or unclean, but he was perſuaded they were unclean; he eſteemed them to be ſuch, and he muſt of neceſſity do ſo, ſo long as he believed the law of Moſes to be in force; as by all that appears in this chapter he did believe.

But ſome may ſay, If this was the caſe, why then doth St. Paul uſe the word *doubting* in the text? To doubt of the unlawfulneſs of an action, is quite another thing than to be perſuaded of the unlawfulneſs of it.

I anſwer to this, I refer my reader to the account I have before given of the word [διακρινόμενος] which may as properly be rendered, He that maketh a difference between meats, as he that doubteth about meats. Now if this verſion be admitted, the ground of this objection is quite taken away. And I ſee no reaſon why it ſhould not be admitted, ſince (as I ſaid) it is as natural as the other, and withal, it makes the apoſtle's ſenſe to run more coherent with what he had ſaid before.

But farther: Let, if you pleaſe, the common tranſlation be retained; let the text be interpreted of one that doubteth, and not of one that maketh a difference: yet ſtill this will make nothing againſt what we have now ſaid. For it is undeniably plain, that what St. Paul here calls *doubting*, is, in our way of ſpeaking,

a degree of perſuaſion. My meaning is this: The *doubting* which St. Paul here ſpeaks of, is not that where a man's judgment is ſuſpended upon account of the equal probabilities on both ſides of the queſtion, which is the proper notion of doubting, and that which we are now concerned with; but he ſpeaks of a doubt ſtrengthened with ſo many probabilities, that it wanted but very little of a perſuaſion; or to ſpeak more properly, it was a real perſuaſion, tho' with ſome mixture of doubtfulneſs in it: that is to ſay, the man had ſo ſtrong convictions of the unlawfulneſs of eating on the one hand, and ſo little ſatisfaction about the lawfulneſs of it on the other, that if he was not fully perſuaded that it was a ſin to eat; yet it appeared by many degrees more probable to him that it was a ſin, than that it was not.

That this now was the caſe, is evident beyond all exception, from the words that follow: *He that doubteth* (ſaith the text) *is condemned if he eat*; that is, condemned of his own conſcience, as I ſhewed before. Now, how could that be, if the man was not in ſome degree perſuaded that his eating was unlawful? It is certain no man can be farther condemned of his own conſcience for doing any action, than he doth believe that action to be forbidden by ſome law of God: To ſay, therefore, that a man is condemned of his own conſcience for eating, muſt of neceſſity imply, that he doth believe his eating to be unlawful; and if ſo, it is certain he doth more than ſimply doubt whether it be lawful or no.

Well, but doth not the apoſtle ſay, in this very chapter, *Let every one be fully perſuaded in his own mind?* What is the meaning of that, but that every one ſhould aſſure himſelf that the action he takes in hand

hand is a lawful action, or elſe he doth not act with a ſafe conſcience? And is not that the very ſame thing that is here ſaid, *He that doubteth is condemned if he eat, becauſe he eateth not of faith*, or with a full perſuaſion? There is therefore good reaſon why we ſhould interpret this text in the proper ſenſe of doubting; the apoſtle himſelf directing us ſo to do by this paſſage.

This is the moſt conſiderable objection that can be made againſt our way of expounding this text; and probably it was with a reſpect to that paſſage, that ſo many interpreters have tranſlated it as they have done; but whether they had any juſt reaſon ſo to do, is the queſtion: or rather, I think, it will be no queſtion with any one who attends either to the deſign, or the words of the apoſtle in that paſſage.

The paſſage is in the fifth verſe of this chapter, where the apoſtle is giving an account of the ſtate of the preſent controverſy. *One man* (ſaith he) *eſteemeth one day above another, another man eſteemeth every day alike: Let every man be fully perſuaded in his own mind.* So we render it; but how truly, I ſhall now examine.

It cannot well be conceived by the coming in of theſe words, that St. Paul had any ſuch thing in his mind when he writ them, as we would now make them to expreſs: it was certainly none of his buſineſs in this place to oblige the contending parties to get full perſuaſions in their ſeveral ways, and then all would be right, for there was too much of that already amongſt them: neither was it his meaning here to tell them, that if in any caſe they acted without a full perſuaſion of the lawfulneſs of the action, they ſinned againſt conſcience; for, beſides that this is certainly falſe, it was nothing at all to his purpoſe.

But

But this was that which he designed in this passage, to perswade both the contending parties quietly to permit each other to enjoy their several opinions and perswasions (in those little matters, which did no way concern their duty) without censuring or judging one another.

This now is a meaning that perfectly suits with all the other good advice he gives them in this chapter, and this meaning he doth express in as apt words as can be thought on: *One man esteemeth one day above another; another man esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be filled with his own mind:* or, *satisfied with his own perswasion.* The original words are [ἕκαστος ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ νοΐ (or τῷ ἰδίῳ νοΐ, without the preposition, as is read in some good copies) πληροφορείσθω] Which, saith Grotius, is an Hebrew way of expression, and signifies no more than this, *Quisque fruatur sua sententia*; Let every man enjoy his own opinion: or, as the vulgar Latin most properly translates, *Unusquisque in suo sensu abundet*; *i. e.* Let every one abound in his own sense: or, lastly, as the commentaries that go under the name of St. Ambrose, *Unusquisque remittatur suis consiliis*; Let every one be left to his own counsels. And to the same sense also both St. Chrysostome and Theodoret do expound this passage. This interpretation, tho' it be very different from that in our English bible, yet expresseth the signification of the original text as well as that; and, withal, hath better authority to recommend it: but that which we chiefly stand upon, is, that the subject-matter and the scope of the apostle doth necessarily require this interpretation.

For, in truth, if this passage be rendered the common way, so as that it shall import, that every man, in every case, is to be fully perswaded in his own mind,

I do not know how the precept here given, can be ſuppoſed to be either reaſonable or poſſible. It is certainly no more in every man's power to be ſatisfied about all his doubts, than it is to believe or diſbelieve what he pleaſes. When there appears reaſon of doubting, it is in vain to command a man not to doubt. Nay, it is as much a man's duty to doubt, and to keep his judgment in ſuſpenſe, when the weight of probability is on both ſides equal, as it is to believe, or diſbelieve upon clear evidence: or rather, in that caſe, a man cannot chuſe but doubt: he cannot reaſonably, nay, he cannot poſſibly do otherwiſe.

I think, by what hath been ſaid, it doth plainly appear, that this text of St. Paul we are upon [*viz. He that doubteth is condemned if he eat*] hath nothing to do with a doubting conſcience in our ſenſe, but only with a reſolved one; and conſequently, that the argument which is brought from hence againſt our aſſertion, is nothing at all to the purpoſe, becauſe it is grounded upon a falſe expoſition of the text.

But tho' this is (as I think) the true anſwer to this argument, and the anſwer indeed which I mainly ſtand upon; yet there is another anſwer given to it by the caſuiſts, which, becauſe it is the anſwer that our learned biſhop Sanderſon thought fit to pitch upon, I ought not to paſs it by without mention, nor, if I can, without ſome improvement.

I muſt confeſs, if we do admit this anſwer, the authority and obligation of a doubting conſcience will be ſet higher than I do in this diſcourſe ſuppoſe it: but however, it may be a good anſwer to the diſſenters, becauſe it unties the difficulty upon their own principles. The anſwer is this:

2.

2. In the ſecond place, allowing that the man whoſe caſe St. Paul ſpeaks to in this text, was really a doubting perſon, and not one that was perſuaded (as we have hitherto ſuppoſed) yet it doth by no means follow, that becauſe this man was guilty of ſin, and condemned for eating thoſe meats, of the lawfulneſs of which he doubted; therefore a man that obeys authority in an inſtance where he doubts of the lawfulneſs of the command, that ſuch a man ſins, and is condemned for ſo doing; this, I ſay, doth not at all follow.

For there is a vaſt diſparity in the caſes, and to argue from one to the other, is to argue from a particular to an univerſal, or from one particular to another, without reſpect to the different circumſtances of each caſe; which is againſt all the rules of logic.

If St. Paul had ſaid [He that doubteth is damned if he act] there had been ſome pretence for making his ſentence an univerſal propoſition, ſo as to extend to all doubting men in all caſes: but now only ſaying [*He that doubteth is damned if he eat*] it ſhews, that he only ſpoke to the particular caſe that was before him; and that other caſes are no farther concerned in his propoſition, than as they do agree in circumſtances with the caſe he there ſpeaks to.

Now the caſe the apoſtle there treats of, and that which we are now concerned about, are ſo far from any way agreeing in the main circumſtances, by which a man is to meaſure the goodneſs or the badneſs of an action, that there cannot be two doubtful caſes put, that are more different, as I ſhall now ſhew.

If St. Paul do at all here ſpeak to the caſe of a doubting man, he ſpeaks of one that acted doubtingly in a matter where it was in his own power to act without a doubt: that is, He was in ſuch circumſtances, that he knew

knew he might certainly, without ſin, refuſe to eat thoſe meats, concerning which he doubted; for there was no colour of obligation upon him to eat them: but yet, in this caſe, where he was perfectly at liberty to let it alone, for the ſerving ſome evil unwarrantable ends, he would not chuſe that ſide which was ſafe, and where he need fear no ſin, which was to forbear; but would chuſe that ſide that was doubtful; that is, would run a needleſs hazard of tranſgreſſing ſome law of God. It is of ſuch a man, and in ſuch a caſe as this, that St. Paul ſpeaks, when he ſaith, *He that doubteth, is condemned if he eat*; ſuppoſing indeed that his words are at all to be expounded in this ſenſe.

But now, becauſe it is thus in this caſe (and in all ſuch like, if you pleaſe) doth it therefore follow from theſe words, that a man that is in other circumſtances, that is not at liberty to chuſe his own way, as not being at his own diſpoſal, but under the direction and government of authority; that this man ſins, and is condemned, if he obey the orders of his ſuperiors, when he is doubtful of the lawfulneſs of the thing in which he expreſſeth his obedience? No, by no means; for this caſe hath a quite different conſideration.

In the former caſe there was only danger on one ſide, and that was in acting; and the man might forbear if he pleaſed, and that without any danger: but in the other caſe there is danger on both ſides, and the man runs at leaſt as great a hazard in forbearing the action (nay, we ſay, a much greater) as if he ſhould do it.

So that undeniably (unleſs we will make one rule to ſerve for all caſes, tho' never ſo different, which is the abſurdeſt thing in the world) for any thing that St. Paul hath here ſaid to the contrary, this latter man may not only without ſin do the thing he doubts of, but is bound

to

to do it: whereas, if the other man, ſpoken of in the text, ſhould do the action he doubts of, it might be a ſin in him.

But farther: That St. Paul meant not to extend his propoſition to all doubtful caſes, but only to ſuch caſes as he here treats of, is pretty evident from the reaſon that he gives, why he that eateth doubtingly ſins in ſo doing, *viz. Becauſe he eateth not of faith.*

He doth not ſay, *He that doubteth is condemned if he eat, becauſe he eateth* with a *doubting* conſcience. If he had ſaid ſo, I grant, the reaſon of his propoſition would have reached all doubting men in all caſes; but this is that which he ſaith, *He that doubteth is condemned if he eat, becauſe he eateth not of faith.*

So that if there be any doubtful caſes, wherein a man may act with faith, notwithſtanding his doubt, I hope it will be allowed, that thoſe caſes are excepted out of St. Paul's propoſition.

Now, that there are ſuch caſes; and, that our caſe of obeying authority is one of them, I thus prove:

Whoſoever ſo acts, as that he is ſatisfied in his own mind, that what he doth is according to his duty in the preſent circumſtances; ſuch a man acts with faith in reference to that action. This is evident from the very notion of faith, as it is here ſpoken of, of which I have before given an account.

But now it is very poſſible that a man may have a doubt concerning the lawfulneſs of an action, and yet be in ſuch circumſtances, as that he ſhall be ſatisfied that it is very reaſonable and agreeable to his duty; nay (as the caſe may be) that he is really bound to do that action, concerning which he thus doubts, rather than not to do it; becauſe the not doing that action, all things

things conſidered, appears to him more dangerous, or attended with worſe conſequences.

This now being granted, it undeniably follows, that wherever a man lights into theſe circumſtances, he is not a ſinner, even according to the ſtricteſt ſenſe of theſe words, tho' he act with ſome kind of doubt, becauſe he acts in faith; that is, he is reſolved in his own conſcience, that thus it behoveth him to act in the preſent caſe; and, that it would be unreaſonable or ſinful to act otherwiſe.

So that let our adverſaries make the moſt of St. Paul's words they can, it is a very illogical inference to ſay, that whoever acts with a doubt upon his conſcience, in any caſe, is guilty of ſin; and much more is it ſo, to affirm it in our preſent caſe of obeying authority: for it is certain, that many men are (and I believe all men may) be ſatisfied, that in a purely doubtful caſe it is not only more reaſonable, but their duty to obey their ſuperiors.

Well; but it will be ſaid, do not we here talk contradictions? Can a man have faith about an action, that is, be reſolved in his own conſcience that ſuch an action is to be done, or may lawfully be done, and yet doubt concerning it at the ſame time?

I anſwer; this is ſo far from being a contradiction, that it is a caſe that every day happens, where a man hath a doubt on both ſides, as it is in the inſtance before us. A man hath often very great doubts of the lawfulneſs of this or the other action, when he conſiders the action in general; but yet when he comes to weigh the circumſtances he is in, and the reaſons he hath in thoſe circumſtances for the doing the action, he may be perſuaded, that it is better for him to do the action than to let it alone, notwithſtanding all the doubts

doubts he hath about it; that is, tho' he doubt of the lawfulness of the action itself, considered without his present circumstances, yet, as it comes circumstantiated to him, he doth not doubt but it may be lawfully done by him. But of this I have spoke largely before, in my explication of the rule of a doubting conscience.

But, is not all doubting contrary to faith? I answer, no, it is not: for such kind of doubting as we here speak of, doth, we see, very well consist with faith. My meaning is, it is not necessary, in order to a man's having faith about an action, that all his doubts concerning that action should be destroyed; it is abundantly sufficient that they be over-balanced.

That which I would say, is this: Wherever a man hath such a degree of persuasion touching any action he is deliberating about, that he believes it more advisable to a reasonable man, all things considered, to do that action, than to forbear it; such a man hath all the faith that is needful to the doing that action with a safe conscience; tho' in the mean time he may have such doubts concerning that action, as will perhaps be too hard for him to resolve, and will create him likewise some trouble and uneasiness in the doing of it: tho' indeed, to speak properly, I think these ought not any longer to be called doubts, after they are thus over-ruled or over-balanced, but rather go under the name and notion of pure scruples, which the casuists of all persuasions do not only allow, but advise that a man should act against.

In plain English, That doubtfulness about an action which St. Paul speaks of, and which he censures as a sin, was such a doubtfulness as, after the action was done, rendered the man self-condemned; his conscience

ence could not but reproach him for doing as he did: but now, in our caſe, the man is not at all ſelf-condemned, becauſe he hath the teſtimony of his conſcience, that he hath acted according to the beſt of his judgment and diſcretion. Tho' he acts with a doubt, yet he is ſatisfied he hath made the moſt reaſonable choice that he could in his circumſtances: and wherever a man doth ſo, he both acts in faith, and without any danger of condemnation from his own conſcience.

So that, after all the buſtle that is made about doing or forbearing an action with a doubting conſcience, you ſee there is no great intricacy in the caſe, nor any neceſſity of ſinning on both hands, always ſuppoſing a man to be ſincere and honeſt; for, if he be really ſo, he will always do that which he judges moſt according to his duty, or, at leaſt, that which he judges to be conſiſtent with it; and wherever a man doth thus, it is certain he acts with a ſafe conſcience, notwithſtanding any doubt he may have about the action: becauſe more than the former a man cannot do, and more than the latter he is not bound to do.

As for what ſins an erroneous conſcience may engage a man in; or what troubleſome reflections a melancholy imagination may occaſion to him in theſe caſes; I am not to anſwer for them, they are of another conſideration.

IV. Having thus largely treated of the nature of a doubting conſcience, and of the rules by which a man is to act, whenever it happens; and that, both when he is left at his own liberty, and when he is under the commands of others: all that remains to be done, is to ſpeak ſomething about the authority or obligation of a doubting conſcience; which is our fourth and laſt general head. But,

But, in truth, the diſcuſſion of this might very well be ſpared, after what I have ſaid relating to this argument in ſeveral places of the foregoing diſcourſe, particularly under my laſt head: however, I ſhall endeavour to give ſome account of this point, tho' I intend it a very ſhort one, becauſe indeed what I have to offer, is not ſo much any new matter, as an application of the principles I have before laid down, to our preſent purpoſe.

The point in queſtion is, concerning the authority of a doubting conſcience; or, whether a doubting conſcience doth bind at all, and how far.

In anſwer to this, I ſay in general, it is certain that a doubting conſcience of itſelf lays no obligation at all upon a man any way: indeed it is a kind of contradiction to ſuppoſe that it ſhould.

For, I pray, what is the notion of a doubting conſcience, but this, That a man is uncertain or unreſolved in his mind, whether, as to this particular action, he be bound or not bound? To ſuppoſe now, that a man is obliged in conſcience either way, by virtue of this doubt, is plainly to ſuppoſe, that a man takes himſelf to be bound, while yet at the ſame time he is diſputing with himſelf whether he be bound or no.

To ſpeak this plainer if I can: ſince conſcience, as I have often ſaid, is nothing elſe but a man's judgment concerning actions, whether they be duties, or ſins, or indifferent: and ſince the law of God commanding or forbidding actions, or neither commanding or forbidding them, is the only rule, by which a man can judge what actions are duties, and what are ſins, and what are indifferent; it plainly follows that a man cannot be bound in conſcience to do any action, which

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it doth not appear to him that God's law hath ſome way or other commanded, and made a duty; or to forbear any action which he is not convinced in his judgment God's law hath ſomewhere or other forbidden, and ſo made a ſin. And therefore, ſince in a caſe where a man is purely doubtful, he cannot be ſuppoſed to have any ſuch convictions that the law of God doth either command or forbid the action doubted of (for if he had, he would no longer doubt) it follows likewiſe by undeniable conſequence, that a man's conſcience is not bound on either ſide of the action, but he may either do it, or forbear it with a ſafe conſcience.

So that if there be any obligation at all upon a man to act thus, rather than otherwiſe, in a doubtful caſe, that obligation muſt ariſe upon one of theſe two accounts; *viz.* either there is ſome law of God concerning a doubting conſcience, which hath tied a man up to ſuch preciſe meaſures of acting; or, at leaſt, a man hath a perſuaſion that there is ſome ſuch law of God.

Now I grant, That in both theſe caſes there doth a direct obligation paſs upon the man's conſcience; but then it is to be remembered, that this obligation doth not ariſe from the man's being doubtful in his conſcience, but from his being reſolved in his conſcience: that is to ſay, if there be really any ſuch law of God, it is the obligation of a right conſcience: or if there be not, but the man only judges that there is, it is then the obligation of an erroneous conſcience: But as for the obligation of a doubting conſcience, there is no ſuch thing.

The great, therefore, or indeed the only point that is to be enquired into, in order to the reſolution of our preſent queſtion, is this: Whether there be any law of

of God which doth determine our actions one way or other, in the caſe of a doubt; and what that law is?

Now, in anſwer to this enquiry, I ſay, That it doth not appear that there is any expreſs law of God in holy ſcripture, that hath laid any obligation upon us as to this particular of a doubting conſcience, either one way or other.

The only texts that I know of, which are thought to make for this purpoſe, are the two paſſages in the xivth of the Romans, which I have before largely given an account of; *viz.* that in the 5th verſe, *Let every man be fully perſuaded in his own mind*; and that other in the laſt verſe, *He that doubteth is damned if he eat, becauſe he eateth not of faith.* But now, I think, I have made it plain by ſeveral arguments, that theſe texts do not at all concern our preſent caſe of a doubting conſcience, properly ſo called.

So that there being no expreſs particular law of God in ſcripture, about acting with a doubting conſcience, we ſeem to be left, as to that affair, to the general laws of God, as they are declared, whether by nature or ſcripture.

Now the moſt that any man can be obliged to by the general laws of God, whether natural or revealed, in the caſe of a doubt, is only theſe two things: Firſt, to uſe his endeavour to get himſelf as well inſtructed in his duty, as his circumſtances and opportunities will allow him; and, Secondly, where he is at a loſs for information, in that caſe to act as reaſonably as he can.

I do not ſay, that a man in every doubtful caſe that happens, is ſtrictly obliged to thus much. But I ſay, it is impoſſible he ſhould be obliged to more. Becauſe indeed more than this he cannot do; and no man can be obliged to more than is in his power.

Wherever therefore a man in a doubtful caſe takes care to obſerve theſe two things, he acts with a ſafe conſcience, however he may act doubtingly in that caſe.

Thus far, I think, we are clear beyond exception. But it may be, ſome will not be ſatisfied with this account of our point, but will be putting a farther queſtion.

We have before laid down ſeveral rules about a man's acting in a doubtful caſe, the ſum of all which comes to no more than what we have now ſaid, *viz.* That in every doubtful caſe a man is to act as reaſonably as he can. The queſtion now is, whether a man is ſtrictly bound in conſcience always to follow this rule? Or, which is to the ſame effect, whether a man, in a matter concerning which he hath only a pure doubt, may not, without ſin, indifferently chuſe either ſide of the action, though yet perhaps one ſide doth appear to him more reaſonable or more ſafe than the other?

This queſtion is indeed more curious than uſeful. But however, ſince it properly falls under the argument we are now treating of, and tends ſomewhat to the clearing of it; I ſhall venture to ſay ſomething to it. Only I declare before-hand, that I mean not in what I ſhall ſay, to aſſert any thing dogmatically, but only to propoſe, in order to farther examination: and withal, that whether that which we ſay be true or falſe, it doth not at all affect the merits of the main cauſe we have undertaken.

That now which I have to ſay to this queſtion, is this: That though it be eternally fit and natural, and conducing to a man's happineſs both in this world and

the other, that he ſhould in all caſes, and eſpecially in doubtful caſes, govern his actions by the beſt reaſon that he hath (and certainly the wiſer and the better any man is, the more ſteadily will he purſue this rule) yet, on the other hand, I dare not ſay, that a man is ſtrictly bound in conſcience ſo to do; ſo as that he is properly guilty of ſin if he do not.

My reaſon is this; becauſe there is no law of God which doth oblige us in all caſes, to do that which is beſt: and if we be not bound to do always that which is beſt, we are not bound to do always that which is moſt reaſonable; for certainly that which is beſt is always moſt reaſonable: and if we be not bound to do that which is moſt reaſonable, much leſs are we bound to do that which is ſafeſt, becauſe that which is ſafeſt, is not always either beſt or moſt reaſonable. And if there be no law of God that doth oblige us to any of theſe things; then it is certain that we do not ſin if we act otherwiſe; for *where there is no law, there is no tranſgreſſion.*

Now, That the firſt of theſe principles is true, we have as good proof as can be deſired, *viz.* the authority of St. Paul, who hath in the viith of the firſt of the Corinthians thus determined: and if that be true, the other two muſt needs be ſo likewiſe, becauſe they follow from it by unavoidable conſequence.

Taking now this for granted, I aſk, what law doth a man tranſgreſs, that in a purely doubtful caſe chuſeth either ſide indifferently, without reſpect to what is ſafeſt or moſt reaſonable: always ſuppoſing that the ſide he chuſeth, be not in itſelf evil and forbidden by God. I ſay, according to theſe principles he tranſgreſſeth no law at all, and conſequently cannot properly be ſaid to ſin at all.

If

If the man be at all guilty, it is upon one of theſe accounts; *viz.* either becauſe he acteth againſt the dictate of his conſcience, or becauſe he acteth againſt the law of God, in preferring that which is leſs reaſonable and ſafe, before that which is more ſo.

Now, upon the former account he is not at all guilty, for his conſcience hath paſſed no dictate, no verdict in this matter, and therefore he cannot be ſuppoſed to act againſt any ſuch dictate or verdict. The man is in ſuch a ſtate, that he either believes he may act as he doth, without violation of his duty; or, at leaſt he hath no belief to the contrary; ſo that his conſcience doth not any way condemn him.

And as for the other thing, of his not chuſing that ſide of the doubtful caſe, which appeared to him moſt reaſonable; it is true, if there was any law of God which obliged him to make ſuch a choice, he would be guilty of ſin if he choſe otherwiſe. But now it doth not appear, that there is any ſuch law of God. Nay, ſo far from that, that it appears from St. Paul, that there is no ſuch law, but that every man is left to his own liberty in this matter; always ſuppoſing that he take care not to chuſe, or do any thing that he judgeth to be inconſiſtent with his duty; which in our caſe we do likewiſe ſuppoſe.

But then having ſaid this, we muſt add farther: That though we here have concluded, that no man, in a doubtful caſe, properly ſo called, is ſtrictly obliged by any law of God, under the penalty of ſin, to chuſe one ſide more than another, but may indifferently chuſe either?

Yet, in the firſt place, Whoever doth believe, or is perſuaded in his own mind, either that he ought not

at all to act againſt a doubt, or that in every doubtful caſe he is bound to follow the ſafer ſide; ſuch a man, ſo long as he ſo believes, cannot without ſin act according to the principles we have now laid down.

And, ſecondly, We are far from encouraging any man to act thus hand over head in a doubtful caſe; much leſs from commending him for ſo doing. For though we ſay, that, ſtrictly ſpeaking, a man doth not ſin, which way ſoever he act in a purely doubtful caſe; yet on the other hand, I think he is but in a low diſpenſation as to virtue and goodneſs, that never looks farther into his actions, nor takes more care about them, than only that they be not directly ſinful.

He that is heartily good, will with St. Paul, not only conſider what things are lawful, but what things are expedient and do edify.

It will not ordinarily be ſufficient to engage ſuch a man in an action, to ſatisfy him, that he may do that action, without tranſgreſſing any law of God: but he will examine whether the doing or forbearing the action doth more ſerve the ends of virtue and charity. And accordingly as that appears to him, ſo will he determine his choice.

In a word, the better and the more virtuous any man is, the more delicate and tender ſenſe will he have, not only of that which the law of God hath preciſely made his duty, and ſo in a proper ſenſe doth oblige his conſcience; but alſo of every thing that is reaſonable and excellent, and praiſe-worthy: ſo that it will really grate upon his mind, to do many things, which in ſtrict ſpeaking cannot be accounted unlawful or forbidden.

And

And thus it is in our preſent caſe. If we ſuppoſe a man to be a devout chriſtian, and a ſincere lover of God, he will not be able to prevail with himſelf, in a caſe where he doubteth, to chuſe either ſide indiſcriminately (though if he ſhould, I do not know, as I ſaid before, what law of God he tranſgreſſeth) but he will weigh and conſider the reaſons on both ſides, and that which appears to him, after ſuch conſideration, to be moſt reaſonable, and conducing to God's glory, and his own and the world's good, that ſhall have the preference.

To come to a concluſion; the ſum of what I have now ſaid, is this: As conſcience is the immediate guide of our actions; ſo the rule, by which conſcience itſelf is to be guided, is the law of God, and nothing elſe.

Though therefore we cannot be ſafe in following our conſcience, where our conſcience is not guided by the law of God (becauſe, as I have often ſaid, our falſe judgment of things doth not cancel our obligation to act according to what the laws of God require of us; unleſs we can juſtly plead unblameable ignorance of thoſe laws) yet, on the other hand, wherever conſcience tells us, that we muſt do this action, becauſe the law of God hath commanded it; we muſt do it, or we ſin.

And again, wherever conſcience tells us, that we muſt avoid this action, becauſe the law of God hath forbidden it, we muſt forbear that action, or we ſin.

But if conſcience cannot ſay, that this action is commanded or forbidden; there we are not tied under the penalty of ſinning, either to do or to forbear that action.

But yet if a man's conſcience ſhould thus ſuggeſt to him; though I cannot ſay directly that this action is a duty, or that it is a ſin, becauſe I am at a loſs how the law of God ſtands as to this matter, and conſequently, I cannot lay any direct obligation upon you either way; yet my advice is, that you would chuſe this way, rather than the other: for this way, all things conſidered, appears moſt fit and reaſonable to be choſen; for there is more probability that this is the right way than the other; or there is leſs harm, though you ſhould be miſtaken, in going this way than the other. Now in this caſe, though a man be not properly obliged, under the guilt of ſin, to obey his conſcience, becauſe conſcience doth not propoſe the choice to him under that condition; yet if he be a wiſe and a good man, he will undoubtedly chuſe that ſide which conſcience, all things conſidered, hath repreſented to him to be the moſt fit and reaſonable to be choſen.

And thus much concerning our fourth and laſt general head.

Thus I have largely diſcuſſed the caſe of a doubting conſcience in general, and anſwered all the conſiderable enquiries that can be made about it. I am not ſenſible that I have left any material difficulty in this argument untouched; though I am very ſenſible I have ſaid a great deal more than needed, in order to the reſolution of that caſe, for the ſake of which I undertook this diſcourſe. But I intended ſuch a diſcuſſion of this argument, as would ſerve for all other caſes as well as that.

I do not know whether it be needful to make a particular application of what I have ſaid upon a doubting conſcience, to the caſe of our preſent diſſenters. However, it will not be amiſs, if I offer ſomething towards it;

it; if it be but to ſave the reader, who is concerned in that caſe, the labour and trouble of doing it.

The caſe that I am to ſpeak to, is briefly this: There are ſeveral perſons that are unſatisfied about the lawfulneſs of our communion, as it is eſtabliſhed and enjoined; and that, upon ſeveral accounts. Some perhaps doubt of the lawfulneſs of all forms of prayer. Others about the lawfulneſs of our form. Others doubt about the lawfulneſs of our ceremonies, or our way of adminiſtring the ſacrament: and others, it may be, about other things. None of them can indeed ſay, that any of theſe things do go againſt their conſcience, or that they believe the uſe of them to be unlawful: for that is the caſe of a reſolved conſcience, with which we have nothing here to do: but they are undetermined and uncertain whether they be lawful or no; and ſo long as they continue under this ſuſpenſe of judgment, they dare not join in our worſhip; fearing they would ſin againſt God if they ſhould.

Now of thoſe that thus doubt there may be two ſorts.

There are ſome perhaps that have only a ſingle doubt in this matter; that is to ſay, they make a doubt whether they may lawfully join with us, ſo long as thoſe ſuſpected conditions are required of them: but they make no doubt, but are very well ſatisfied, that they may lawfully ſeparate from us.

Again, there are others that doubt on both ſides, as they have good reaſon to do. That is, as they doubt on one hand, whether the terms of our communion be not ſinful; ſo they doubt on the other hand, whether it be not ſinful to ſeparate upon account of thoſe terms.

Now of theſe, likewiſe, there may be two ſorts.

Some perhaps are equally doubtful, whether the terms of our communion be lawful or no.

Others doubt unequally; that is, are more inclined to believe that they are sinful, than that they are lawful.

That now which is to be enquired into, is; what is most reasonable and adviseable in point of conscience to be done in each of these cases?

Now, as to the first of these cases, where a man hath only a doubt on one side, and that is, whether he may lawfully communicate with us; but he hath no doubt that he may lawfully separate. To this I say two things:

First, That the man's doubting only on one side in the matter, doth not make it more safe for him to separate, than if he had doubted on both sides. Because indeed if he must doubt at all, it is his duty, he is bound to doubt on both sides; and he is guilty of gross and criminal ignorance of the laws of God, if he do not. And if so, then his doubting only on one side, doth not alter the case, but it must have the same resolution, as if it was a double doubt properly so called.

If it be said, that it is a constant rule of a doubting conscience, and we have allowed it as such, that in cases where a man hath only a doubt on one side of an action, it is more safe to chuse that side, on which he hath no doubt, than that other, concerning which he doubts: I do readily grant it. But it is to be remembered, that that rule is always intended, and doth only obtain in such cases, where a man may certainly without danger of sinning forbear that action, of the lawfulness of which he doubts; though he cannot, without danger of sinning, do the action, so long as he doubts

doubts about it. But now, in our caſe here, it is evident to all men that are not wilfully blind, that as there may be a danger of ſinning, if a man ſhould conform with a doubting conſcience; ſo there is certainly a danger of ſinning (nay, and we ſay a much greater danger) if a man do not conform. So that that rule hath here no place at all.

The truth is, our caſe, if it be rightly put, is this: A man is here ſuppoſed to reaſon thus with himſelf: "I am very well ſatisfied in my own mind, and I "make no doubt at all, that I may lawfully and with- "out danger of ſin, cut myſelf off from the commu- "nion of the church [which yet by his chriſtianity he "is bound to maintain and preſerve as far as he can] "And I may likewiſe lawfully, and without danger "of ſinning, live in a conſtant diſobedience and re- "fractorineſs to all that authority that God hath ſet o- "ver me [to which yet by as plain laws as any are in "nature, or the goſpel, he is bound to be ſubject] I "ſay, I am ſatisfied in my own mind, that I may law- "fully do both theſe things. But I am very unſatiſ- "fied and doubtful, whether in my preſent circum- "ſtances, it is not my duty thus to do; ſo as that I "ſhall ſin if I do not."

What now would any prudent man ſay to this caſe? Why certainly he would ſay this? That he who can doubt after this faſhion, is either a very ill man or a very ignorant one. And that ſuch a man doth a great deal more ſtand in need of good advice, and wholſome inſtructions about the plain duties of chriſtianity, than of rules and directions how to behave himſelf in doubtful caſes. Becauſe indeed the beſt rules of that kind are not to his caſe, ſo long as he continues thus igno-

rant. And if he ſhould obſerve them, yet that would not juſtify his acting, if it ſhould indeed prove contrary to the law of God, becauſe it was both in his power, and it was his duty to know better. A man's right proceeding according to the rules of a doubting conſcience, in a caſe where he is entangled by a wilfully erroneous one; will no more diſcharge him from ſin, as to his ſoul, if he do an evil action, than the ſecond concoction, though never ſo regular, can rectify the errors of the firſt as to his body.

But ſecondly, Though that which I have now offered, be the proper anſwer to the caſe before us; yet there is this farther to be ſaid to it, *viz.* Though we ſhould ſuppoſe that the law of God had not obliged us to keep the unity of the church, or to obey our lawful ſuperiors; but had left it as an indifferent matter, and that there was no danger at all in forbearing theſe things; but the only danger was in doing them; ſo that the doubt about conformity ſhould have perfectly the nature of a ſingle doubt, as it is put in the caſe: I ſay, now even upon this ſuppoſition it will bear a juſt diſpute, whether conformity or nonconformity be the more eligible ſide: Nay, I ſay farther, that if the rule I laid down about a ſingle doubt be true, it will appear, that as theſe things now ſtand, it is more reaſonable for a man to obey the laws, and communicate with the church, ſo long as he hath only a bare doubt about the lawfulneſs of theſe things, than to diſobey and ſeparate.

For thus I argue: Though in a ſingle doubt the rule be, that a man ſhould chuſe that ſide of an action, concerning which he hath no doubt, rather than that, concerning which he doubts; yet, as was ſaid before, that

rule

rule is always to be underſtood with this *proviſo*, that all other conſiderations in the caſe be equal. If it ſhould happen that a very great good may be compaſſed, or a very great evil may be avoided, by acting on the doubtful ſide; that very conſideration hath weight enough with a wiſe man to turn the balance on that ſide; and to make that, which, abſtractedly conſidered, was a doubtful caſe, to be clear and plain when it comes clothed with ſuch circumſtances. As I gave inſtances in the caſe of uſury and law-ſuits. And twenty more might be added to them, if it was to any purpoſe.

If this now be admitted for truth, we have a plain reſolution of the caſe before us, that is this: There are ſo many great advantages both to the kingdom, and to a man's ſelf, to be obtained by worſhipping God in the way of the church; and likewiſe ſo many both public and private miſchiefs and inconveniencies that are conſequent upon ſeparation; that if in any caſe theſe conſiderations have weight enough to over-balance a ſimple doubt about the lawfulneſs of an action, they will certainly have ſufficient weight in this caſe. And that a man who is not ſwayed by them, doth not act ſo reaſonably as he might do.

For my part, I ſhould think it very fooliſhly done of any man, that, ſo long as he is utterly uncertain whether he be in the right or the wrong (as every one that doubteth is) ſhould be ſo confident of his point, as to venture upon it no leſs a ſtake than the peace of the kingdom where he lives, and the ſecurity of the religion eſtabliſhed; and withal his own eaſe and liberty, and laſtly, the fortunes alſo of his poſterity. And yet ſuch a wiſe venture as this doth every one among us make, that, upon the account of a bare doubt about the

the lawfulneſs of the things enjoined in our communion, doth perſiſt in diſobedience to the government, and ſeparation from the church.

I wiſh this was well conſidered by our doubting diſſenters: they are wiſe enough as to the world in other matters; it is to be deſired that they would be as wiſe in this. And if they were, I dare ſay it would not at all prejudice their wiſdom as to the other world. It will be but little either to their comfort or their reputation at the long run, to have it ſaid of them, that, beſides the diſturbance they have all along occaſioned to the public peace and unity, they have alſo brought their eſtates and families into danger of ruin, by the juſt proſecutions of law they have drawn upon themſelves; and all this for the ſake of a cauſe they themſelves muſt confeſs, they are altogether uncertain and unreſolved about.

But this will appear much clearer, when we have ſet the doubt about conformity upon the right foot; *viz.* conſidered it as a double doubt, as indeed it is, in its own nature: which I come now to do.

In the ſecond place, there are other diſſenters who (as they have good reaſon) do doubt on both ſides of this queſtion. As they doubt on one hand, whether it be not a ſin to conform to our worſhip; becauſe there are ſeveral things in it which they ſuſpect to be unlawful; ſo on the other hand, they doubt whether it be not their duty to conform to it; becauſe the laws of the church, and of the land, do require them ſo to do. And of theſe, as I ſaid, there are likewiſe two ſorts. Some perhaps are equally doubtful whether the terms of our communion are lawful or no, and conſequently muſt doubt equally whether they be bound to con-

conform or no. Others doubt unequally: that is to ſay, of the two, it appears more probable to them, that our communion is ſinful, than that it is a duty.

Now as to the firſt of theſe caſes, the anſwer is very ſhort, and it is this: "We have before proved by ma-"ny arguments, that in a caſe of a pure doubt, about "the lawfulneſs of an action where the probabilities "on both ſides are pretty equal: in that caſe the com-"mand of authority doth always turn the balance on "its own ſide; ſo, as that it is not only reaſonable "for the man to do that in obedience to authority, "of the lawfulneſs of which he doubteth; but it is "his duty to do it; he ſins if he do not." For this I refer my reader to the third general head of this diſcourſe.

The only difficulty thereof is in the other caſe, where the doubt is unequal. And here the caſe is this: As the man apprehends himſelf in danger of ſinning if he do not come to church, and obey the laws; ſo he apprehends himſelf in a greater danger of ſinning if he do: becauſe it doth appear more probable to him, that our communion is ſinful, than that it is a duty: and a greater probability, *cæteris paribus*, is always to be choſen before a leſs.

But to this likewiſe we are ready provided of an anſwer from the foregoing diſcourſe, *viz.* "That though "it ſhould be ſuppoſed, that in ſuch a caſe as this, "where the balance is ſo far inclined one way; the "authority of our ſuperiors alone will not have weight "enough to caſt it on its own ſide: yet in this parti-"cular caſe of church communion, there are ſo many "other arguments to be drawn from the conſideration "of the greater ſin, and the more dreadful conſe-

"quences,

" quences, of diſobeying the laws than of obeying " them; as will, with any impartial conſcientious man, " out-weigh all the probabilities on the other ſide, ſo " long as they are not ſo great as to create a perſua- " ſion, and make it reaſonable for him rather to con- " form, how ſtrong ſoever his doubt be about the " lawfulneſs of conformity (ſo long as it is but a doubt) " than to continue in ſeparation. *Vide* Third propo- " ſition about a double doubt, pag. 404."

This is the iſſue upon which we will try the point before us, and I refuſe no indifferent man, that will but have the patience to hear what we have to ſay, to be umpire between us and our diſſenting brethren, as to this controverſy.

In the firſt place, let us ſuppoſe and admit, that the man who hath theſe doubts and ſuſpicions about the lawfulneſs of our eſtabliſhed worſhip, doth really doubt on the true ſide; and that he would indeed be a tranſgreſſor of the law of God, if he ſhould conform to it. But then it muſt be admitted likewiſe, that that law of God which forbids theſe things in diſpute, is wonderfully obſcurely declared.

There are no direct prohibitions, either in the law of nature or the book of God, about thoſe things that are now conteſted; ſo that the unlawfulneſs of them is only to be concluded from conſequences.

And thoſe conſequences likewiſe are ſo obſcure, that the catholic church, from Chriſt's time till our reformation, was wholly ignorant of them. For though it doth appear, that either theſe, or the like uſages, have always been in the church; yet it doth not appear, in all that compaſs of time, either that any particular church ever condemned them as ſinful; or indeed, that

that any particular chriſtian did ever ſeparate from the church upon the account of them.

And even at this day, theſe conſequences by which they are proved unlawful, are not diſcovered by our governors either in church or ſtate: no, nor by as learned and religious divines of all perſuaſions as any in the world.

The moſt divines, by far the moſt; and thoſe as pious and as able as any, are clearly of opinion, that there is nothing unlawful in our worſhip; but that, on the contrary, all things therein preſcribed are at leaſt innocent, and free from ſin, if not pure and apoſtolical.

So that if it ſhould at laſt prove, that they are all miſtaken: yet the law of God, which forbids theſe things, being ſo very obſcure, and the ſenſe of it ſo hardly to be found out; it is a great preſumption that a man may very innocently and inculpably be ignorant of it. And if ſo, it will be a very little, or no ſin at all in him to act againſt it: becauſe if it was not his duty to know this law, it cannot be his ſin that his practice is not according to it. And if it was his duty to know it, yet it being ſo obſcurely delivered, and only to be gathered by ſuch remote conſequences; it can at moſt be but a ſin of ignorance, in an ordinary perſon, where ſo many of the beſt guides are miſtaken, if he ſhould tranſgreſs it.

And then farther, this muſt likewiſe be conſidered; that if conformity to our liturgy and worſhip ſhould prove a ſin in any inſtance; yet the evil conſequences of it extend no farther than the man's perſon that is guilty of it. There is no damage ariſeth either to the chriſtian religion, or to the public intereſt of the kingdom,

dom, by any man's being a conformiſt. But on the contrary, as things ſtand with us, unity and conformity to the eſtabliſhed way ſeem to bring a great advantage to both (as I hinted before) and to be a probable means to ſecure us from many dangers, with which our reformed religion, and the peace of the kingdom is threatned.

Well, but now on the other hand, let us ſuppoſe the contrary ſide of the queſtion to be true, *viz.* That our governors in this matter are in the right, and we are in the wrong: That there is nothing required of us in the church of England, as a term of communion, but what is very innocent and lawful; however it be our misfortune to doubt that there is; and, in a zealous indulgence to theſe doubts, we take the liberty to live in open diſobedience to our lawful governors, and break the unity of the church into which we were baptized:

I ſay, admitting the thing to be thus; what kind of ſin ſhall we be guilty of then? Why certainly we are guilty of no leſs a ſin than cauſeleſsly dividing the body of Chriſt, againſt which we are ſo ſeverely cautioned in the New-teſtament.

We are guilty of the breach of as plain laws as any are in the bible, *viz.* Of all thoſe that oblige us to *keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*; that command us to *obey thoſe that are over us in the* Lord; *to be ſubject to the higher powers*; *to ſubmit to every ordinance of man for the* Lord's *ſake*; *to be ſubject not only for wrath, but for conſcience ſake.* I ſay, theſe plain laws we diſobey for *conſcience ſake*; and we diſobey them too in ſuch inſtances, where we have the whole catholic church of old, and far the greateſt and

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the beſt part of the preſent church, of a different perſuaſion from us.

Well, but as if this was not enough; what are the conſequences of this our ſin? (for by the conſequences of a ſin, the greatneſs of it is always to be eſtimated, I ſpeak as to the material part of it, with which we are here concerned) why, they are moſt terrible and dreadful, both with reſpect to ourſelves and others.

By this unnatural ſeparation, we do, for any thing we know, put ourſelves out of the communion of the catholic church; and conſequently out of the enjoyment of the ordinary means of ſalvation.

We maintain and keep up diviſions and diſorders in the church, and lend a helping hand to all thoſe animoſities and hatreds, all that bitter contention and ſtrife, and uncharitableneſs, which hath long torn the very bowels of Chriſt's church, and given occaſion to that deluge of atheiſm, and profaneneſs, and impiety which hath overſpread the face of it.

We put affronts upon our lawful governors, who ſhould be in the place of God to us. We give ſcandal to all our brethren that make a conſcience of living peaceably and piouſly. And laſtly, as we offer a very fair handle and pretence to all diſcontented and factious men to practiſe againſt the beſt of governments; ſo we take a moſt effectual courſe to ruin the beſt conſtituted church in the world, and with it the reformed religion in this kingdom.

This now being the nature, and theſe being the conſequences of our ſeparation from the eſtabliſhed church among us; I leave it to any indifferent man to determine, whether any doubt about the lawfulneſs of our communion, though that doubt be backed with

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greater probabilities than do appear on the other side; nay, if you will, with all the probabilities that can consist with the nature of a doubt, can have weight enough to balance against such a sin, and such consequences as separation in our case doth involve a man in. I think there is no unconcerned person but will pronounce, that supposing, where there are doubts on both sides, a man is to chuse that side on which there is the least appearance of sin; he is in this case certainly bound to chuse communion with the established church, rather than separation from it. And that is all I contend for.

But now, after all this is said; it must be acknowledged, that if there be any man who hath other apprehensions of these matters, and that, after a consideration of all things that are to be said for or against conformity, it doth appear to him, upon the whole matter, both more probable that our communion is sinful, than that it is a duty; and withal, that to communicate with us, will involve him in a greater sin, and in worse consequences, than to continue in separation: I say, if any man have so unfortunate an understanding as to make such an estimate of things; we must acknowledge, that according to all the rules of a doubting conscience, such a man is rather to continue a nonconformist, than to obey the laws of the king and the church. But then let him look to it; for his acting in this case according to the best rules of a doubting conscience, will not (as I said before) at all acquit him either of the guilt or consequences of criminal schisms and disobedience: supposing that indeed he is all along under a mistake, as (we say) he certainly is; and that there is nothing required in our com-

communion, that he might not honeſtly and lawfully comply with, as there certainly is not. Unleſs in the mean time, the man fell into theſe miſtakes without any fault of his; and God Almighty, who is the judge of all mens hearts and circumſtances, doth know he had not means and opportunities to underſtand better.

*The End of the Second* VOLUME.